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WASHTENAW JEWISH NEWS

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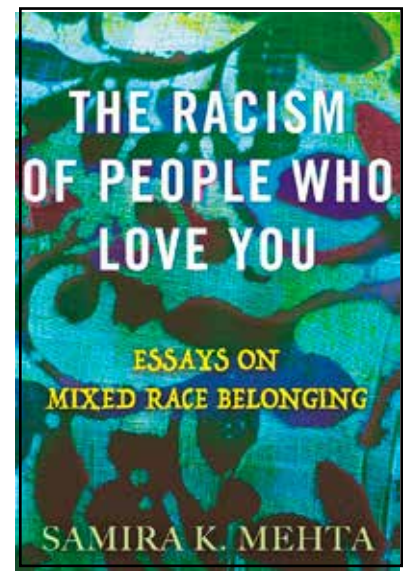
Dr. Samira Mehta on "Jews of Color: One Term, Many Communities"

The Eastern Michigan University Center for Jewish Studies is excited to announce that it is bringing Professor Samira Mehta to Southeastern Michigan. Professor Mehta is author of *Beyond Chrismukkah: The Christian-Jewish Interfaith Family in the United States*, which was published in 2018 with the University of North Carolina Press, and *The Racism of People Who Love You: Essays on Mixed Race Belonging* with Beacon Press in 2023. She has another book, *God Bless the Pill: The Surprising History of Contraception and Sexuality in American Religion* coming out in April 2026, again with University of North Carolina Press. Professor Mehta is also the primary investigator of a Henry Luce Foundation funded collaboration titled "Jews of Color: Histories and Futures," and it is on this topic that she will speaking in Southeastern Michigan.

On February 16 at 7 p.m., Professor Mehta will deliver a talk titled "Jews of Color: One Term, Many Communities" in the EMU Student Center (Room 300). In this talk, Professor Mehta will explore the many ways that Jews of color come to and understand their Jewish identities, dispelling common misperceptions and answering questions about the experience of Jews of Color in the United States. The Network: Jewish People of Color of Greater Ann Arbor is co-sponsoring this event.

DR. SAMIRA MEHTA



Professor Mehta will also be presenting this talk under the auspices of the EMU Center for Jewish Studies on Sunday, February 15, at the J in West Bloomfield in partnership with SAJE (Seminars for Adult Jewish Enrichment). This continues a trend begun last January, when the Center for Jewish Studies brought another speaker, Professor Rachel Gross, to present both at EMU and at the J in West Bloomfield.

Professor Mehta's talk will be delivered at 7 p.m. in room 300 of the EMU Student Center, 900 Oakwood Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. This event is free, open to the public, and validation for parking will be provided. Please send inquiries to jewish.studies@emich.edu.■

Orthodox women social media influencers: Traditional or contemporary?

The University of Michigan Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies is pleased to announce that Professor Ayala Fader of Fordham University will deliver the 36th Annual David W. Belin Lecture at the Michigan Union on Thursday, March 26. All are invited to attend this free public event. Learn more and RSVP at https://myumi.ch/15PN8 if you are interested.

This year's lecture, titled "Orthodox Jewish Wellness Influencers in the Age of Viral Politics," will focus on frum (Orthodox) Jewish women wellness influencers on social media. Despite attempts by some rabbis to silence them, frum influencers in the United States and Israel continue to share intimate details of their everyday lives online, earning a living through the promotion of products linked to their platforms. Fader's presentation will examine the seemingly contradictory worlds these influencers navigate: while claiming new forms of gendered authority, they simultaneously reinforce traditional Jewish family structures and gender roles.

Drawing inspiration from conservative Christian wellness influencers, frum influencers create content that asserts Jewish exceptionalism while fostering unexpected exchanges with conservative Christian women. The lecture will consider whether frum social media influencers are subtly promoting illiberal politics through the gendered language of wellness.

Fader is Professor of Anthropology and Jewish Studies at Fordham University. She is the author of the award-winning books *Mitzvah Girls* (2009) and *Hidden Heretics* (2020). Fader's research has been generously supported by numerous fellowships and grants, including those from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. As the founding director of Fordham's New York Center for Public Anthropology & Sociology, she leads the Demystifying Language Project, which makes linguistic anthropology a social justice resource for public high schools.

The David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs was established in 1991 through a generous gift from the late David W. Belin of Des Moines, Iowa, and New York to provide an academic forum for the discussion of contemporary Jewish life in the United States. As the founding chair of Reform Judaism's Outreach Commission and a founding member of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, Belin served the American Jewish community in numerous leadership roles. His commitment to the future of American Jewry inspired him to endow this annual lectureship, providing a forum for meaningful discussion of contemporary Jewish life in the United States.

Since its establishment as a center in 1988, the University of Michigan Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies has become one of the world's leading Jewish Studies programs in a broad array of fields and disciplines. Learn more about the Frankel Center at https://lsa.umich.edu/judaic. ■

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From the editor

From twig to parsley

And so, the cycle of spring Jewish holidays commences. Yes, Tu'B'Shvat, the reminder that spring will come, is in the heart of winter, but only one moon cycle later, we are at Purim, and then the next full moon and here is Pesach. I feel like K'tonton hopping from frozen twig to noisy grogger to hiding in the parsley. We have so many tools and methods to connect to God and to resist tyranny.

As I write this, it is just three days since the livestreamed murder of Alex Pretti in Minneapolis by federalized agents. Even before this, hundreds of Jewish clergy showed up in person and online in resistance to ICE roundups in the Twin Cities and current threats to 14th Amendment guarantees all over the U.S.

The widespread and growing resistance to authoritarianism in the U.S. will likely bring into contact people who have not been on the same page over the last two and a half years. For many in the Jewish community the issues in Israel/Palestine and the United States are very different: Palestinians, many believe, are trying to destroy Israel, so Israel's decimation of Gaza was warranted, whereas immigrants/people of color are not trying to destroy the U.S., and therefore the deployment of the military to U.S. cities is not warranted. For others, there is a throughline from Gaza to Minneapolis: those in power seem to believe some humans have less right to life and liberty than others. This characterization hardly touches the many different mindsets we are coming to the current moment with, but my hope is that our shared resistance to pharaoh presents openings to connection and to more open discussion.

In the meantime, may the frigid temps build our resilience and our anticipation of the season of freedom.■

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Phone numbers, websites, and addresses of organizations frequently listed in the calendar:

Ann Arbor Orthodox Minyan (AAOM): 1429 Hill Street, 248-408-3269, annarborminyan.org
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 734-445-1910, aarecon.org
Beth Israel Congregation (BIC): 2000 Washtenaw Ave, 734-665-9897, bethisraelaa.org
Chabad House: 715 Hill Street, 734-995-3276, jewmich.com
Eastern Michigan University Center for Jewish Studies (EMU): www.emich.edu/jewish-studies/
Frankel Center: 202 S. Thayer St., lsa.umich.edu/judaic/
Jewish Community Center (JCC): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 745-971-0990, jccannarbor.org
Jewish Cultural Society (JCS): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 734-975-9872, jewishculturalsociety.org
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Pardes Hannah: 2010 Washtenaw Ave, 734-761-5324, pardeshannah.org
Temple Beth Emeth (TBE): 2309 Packard Road, 734-665-4744, templebethemeth.org
UM Hillel: 1429 Hill Street 734-769-0500, michiganhillel.org

Coming soon

New theater studio space, new play

On February 20–22, *A Joyride in Memory Care* written and performed by Ann Arbor native Rick Sperling, will be at Forge Theater, a new studio performance space in Ann Arbor.

Rick Sperling

Sperling, an actor, director, and playwright best known as the founder of Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit, has created a one-person play about his experiences with his mother, Doris Sperling, and a colorful cast of characters — all portrayed by Sperling — in a memory care facility for people dealing with dementia.

In *Joyride* we see Sperling witness his dynamic mother Doris — a trailblazing teacher and youth advocate — lose her once powerful voice. To his surprise he discovers deep beauty, dignity, and humor among the incredible people in memory care living out their last days in a brave new world.

Sperling has performed *Joyride* for individual performances throughout southeast Michigan for the past year and a half, but this will be the first weekend run of the show made possible by support by the Washtenaw County nonprofit Dementia Friendly Services (DFS).

For DFS's Executive Director, Jim Mangi, producing this show was personal, as well as a way to expand awareness about dementia and its impact on those affected and their families. "My wife was in memory care for over 7 years," says Mangi. "So, I know that Rick Sperling's portrayal of the people dealing with dementia is right on. Rick, his mom, and the other characters in his play make us weep with them; they make us laugh with them, and mostly they help us see people with dementia as what they are and always will be: persons deserving love and respect."

DFS will lead a post-show discussion with light refreshments after each performance.

This four-performance run will take place at the new Ann Arbor performance space Forge Theater, focused on the development and showcasing new works of theatre. "We're delighted that *A Joyride in Memory Care* will be the first show ever in our Studio space," says Forge founder Catherine Zudak. "With Forge's deep ties to the long history of independent theater in Ann Arbor, it's a perfect fit that our inaugural production comes from an Ann Arbor native with a moving and joyful story about lost memories and found moments."

"I am thrilled that *Joyride* is getting its first full weekend of performances, and to be the debut production of a new Ann Arbor space devoted to new works is perfect.," says University of Michigan theatre professor Malcolm Tulip, an acclaimed actor and director both locally and internationally. Tulip saw an earlier production of the play at the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson, Michigan. "I'm so happy I was able to see Rick's piece about his journey with his mother, the incredible Ann Arbor educator and arts advocate Doris Sperling, through dementia. This brave piece of writing is a powerful and deeply touching cross between memoir, documentary, and dramatic reading."

"With his Dickens-like characterizations," says Tulip. "Rick leads us through a journey that is in turns sad, joyful, hilarious and uncompromisingly honest. Through this play, Doris is still teaching us five years after her passing."

The playtimes are Friday February 20, at 7 p.m., Saturday February 21, at 3 p.m., and Sunday February 22, at 3 and 7 p.m. Tickets are $25 plus a $2.50 box office fee and are available online at www.forgetheatercollaborative.com.

The Forge Theater is located at 3000 Packard Street, Suite B, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Entrance facing Platt Road (behind Little Caesars) Parking on Packard. 40-seat capacity.

For more information call or text 734-219-9434 ■

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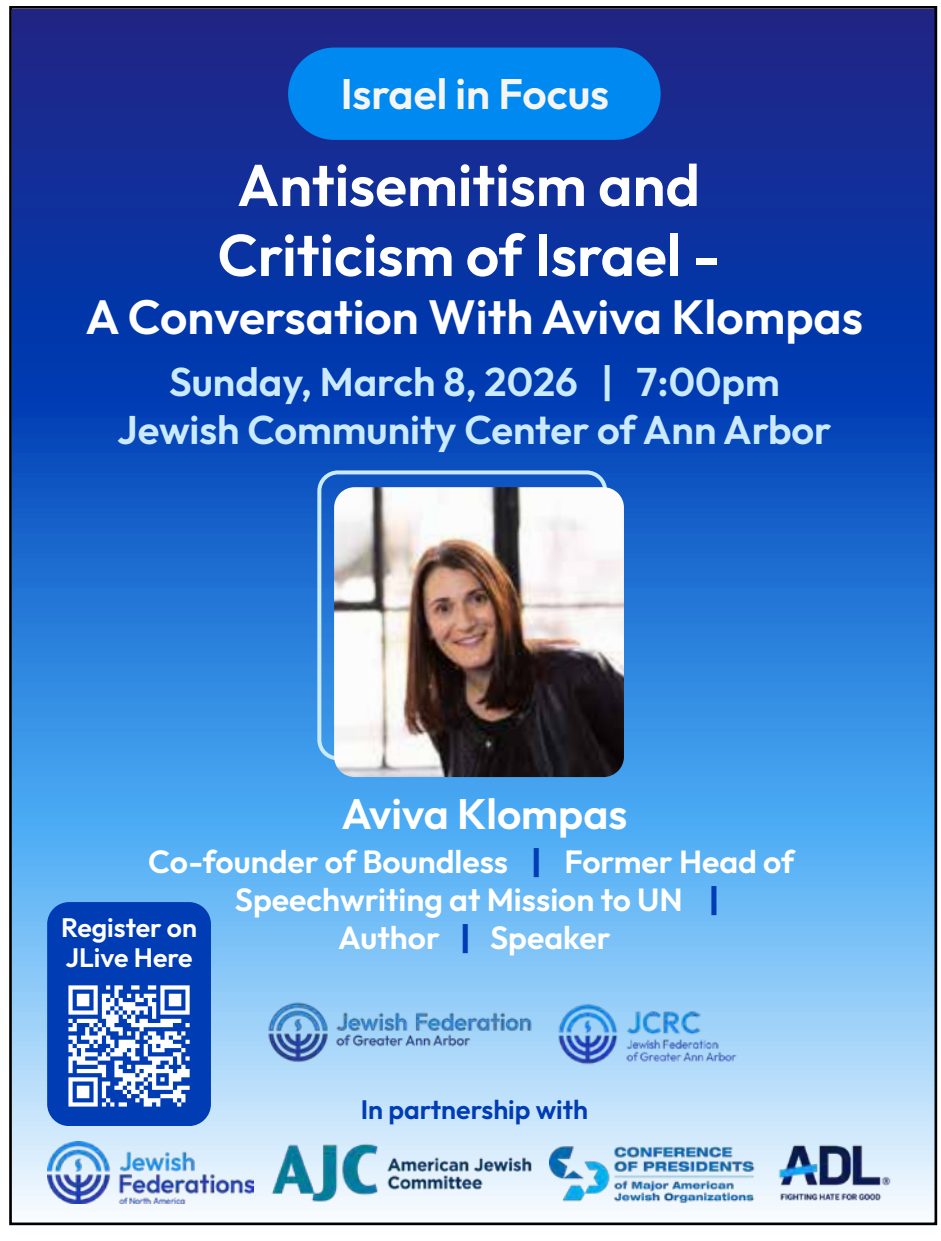
Shinshinim update

By Ori Raveh and Carmel Ingber

This Hanukkah, the Shinshinim (Israeli youth ambassadors) were proud to bring Israeli spirit and traditions to the greater Ann Arbor Jewish community. Throughout the month, they led several Hanukkah celebrations across the community, bringing families together to mark the holiday in a warm and inclusive setting. The events highlighted shared traditions and created opportunities for connection among participants of all ages. Highlights included making edible dreidels at the JCC's Early Childhood Center and Temple Beth Emeth's religious school and hosting a Hanukkah party for local Israeli families.

The ShinShinim hosted a Hanukkah-themed story time at the local library, where children and families took part in an interactive reading experience centered on the holiday's values. Together with children and families, they prepared edible dreidels, designed menorahs, and celebrated with sufganiyot (donuts), chocolate coins, and joyful Hanukkah songs. The program offered an engaging and educational way for young participants to connect with Hanukkah.

These activities reflected the ShinShinim's ongoing commitment to community building and cultural engagement. For more information or to get involved with Shinshinim activities, contact Ori (ori@jewishannarbor.org) or Carmel (carmel@jewishannarbor.org). ■



Rabbi Asher Lopatin leads academic and cultural mission to Syria

In December, Jewish Federation's Community Relations Director Rabbi Asher Lopatin led an academic and cultural mission to Syria, with the goal of solidifying and deepening relations with the University of Damascus and the Damascus National Museum and American universities. The delegation of five participants was organized with the Syrian Foreign Ministry and the Syrian Mosaic Foundation. Dartmouth University Professor Susannah Heschel and Dr. Jill Joshowitz of New York University (NYU) were among the participants

After a warm VIP welcome at the airport, the group visited the well-kept Al-Franje synagogue and were honored to light Chanukah candles there to celebrate the eighth day of Chanukah. They continued to the Jewish cemetery to help with bringing the marker of Rabbi Chayim Vital's wife — currently strewn upside down in a faraway place in the cemetery — to the chapel housing Rabbi Chayim Vital's stone. Another Chanukah menorah was lit at the new five-star Semiramis Hotel, where the owner treated the group to a fully kosher meal — including new dishes and silverware purchased just for kosher customers and meat brought in from America. The chefs proudly and graciously showed the group the fully kosher kitchen and preparation space.

The second day was filled with meetings with the President and several Deans of the University of Damascus, a university with 200,000 students. There was also a larger convening with 20 professors and students. Discussions focused on possible partnerships between the American universities and the University of Damascus.

The delegation headed to the Damascus National Museum to discuss future collaborations between NYU and the museum around the Dura Europas frescoes from a nearly 2,000-year-old synagogue beautifully persevered in the museum. After another kosher dinner at the Semiramis, the participants were guests of honor at an event with the Syrian American Business Council.

On the final day of the trip, the group visited a stunning villa from the 19th century. Upon learning that the Damascus airport was closed due to fog, their dear (new) friend, Mohammad, who worked for the Syrian American Business Council, arranged a minivan to drive (with an armed escort) all the way to the Amman airport in Jordan where everyone caught flights back to the U.S.

This was Rabbi Lopatin's third visit to Damascus in the past year. "We were deeply inspired by the kindness, warmth, and sincerity of the Syrian people — among the most generous and welcoming individuals I have encountered in my travels," he said. "From government officials to business leaders and their families, from young people to elders in Damascus, and even our guards, who eagerly took photos with us and were constantly attentive to our safety, we felt nothing but hospitality and care." Rabbi Lopatin reported that they felt safe throughout the visit. He is hopeful that a "new Syria can build lasting relationships with the United States and the broader Western democratic world, and that it may one day become a genuine partner of Israel's — one in which Syria benefits from all that Israel has to offer, and Israel benefits from an Arab neighbor committed to peace with all its neighbors." ■

At the Al-Franje Synagogue in Damascus

48 hours in Damascus, Part 3 of 4

By David Horovitz, introduced by Rabbi Asher Lopatin

Like many of us, I had followed closely the news of the rapid fall of the brutal Assad regime in Syria in December 2024, defeating Assad's troops and his allies Hezbollah and Iran. Nevertheless, I was surprised to receive a call in February of 2025 from a Muslim Syrian friend and partner in Muslim Jewish relations in Michigan urging me to join a small group of Jews returning to Syria. With the approval of my dear wife, I joined two Syrian rabbis (father and son), and coaxed a friend, also involved in interfaith relations, to come along. What followed was an incredible experience that led to organizing my own trip to Syria in September through the Syrian Foreign Ministry, bringing 10 Jewish leaders, some of them from Israel, to Syria on a Goodwill Mission. The article you will read was written by one of them, David Horovitz, Editor and Founder of the Times of Israel.

Day two: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates

Tuesday is our meet-the-ministers day, and it begins at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We drive in our fleet of turquoise taxis to an area that combines new and under-construction high-quality residential high-rises and large, grand, white stone government offices. There are 10 high-rises nearing completion in the area immediately around the ministry building, a controlled frenzy of rebuilding.

Received with smiles and a fairly perfunctory security check, we wait in a spacious ground-floor room for Qutaiba Idlbi, a former senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Middle East Programs and today the director of American Affairs at the ministry.

Tall, well-dressed and a perfect English speaker, he proves to be by far the most outspoken of the senior officials with whom we will meet. And he reserves his heaviest criticism for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli government's dealings with the new Syrian leadership.

Idlbi opens by saying that it is important to help Syria reconnect with its people, including its Jews. He notes lightly that ancestry.com has informed him that he himself has "14% Ashkenazi blood." The room laughs.

He calls December 8, 2024, "the start of a new era for Syria — building bridges internally and externally" and notes that the Jewish community well knows about "the fractures" of previous decades that forced its near-complete departure.

Lopatin stresses the goodwill nature of the group's visit, Chitrik notes that Jews have been in Syria for thousands of years, and Idlbi responds that the new leadership wants those abroad to know that they will be welcomed if they want to come home.

He also says the ministry has just appointed a young official, Hamad Kara Ali, with whom we meet later, to work on matters that affect the Jewish community, including disputes relating to property and other assets lost due to persecution.

"We are trying to build a bridge" to Syrian Jews in the Diaspora, Idlbi says, and to help them come back should they so desire. He says officials have met with Syrian Jews in New York. (There are rumors that Sharaa may hold such meetings during his imminent visit for the UN General Assembly.)

He says Syria is trying to build a foreign policy based on "relationships and cooperation and shared interests, and management of disagreements rather than conflict."

He believes, and we hear this from all the ministers we meet, that "stability is the desire of the Syrian people," although "there are some attempts" by members and supporters of the Assad regime to prevent this. The fact is, he says, that the Syrian people "have the ability to start a civil war" — or rather restart one — "if they want to. They don't want to."

Nonetheless, he stresses, "we do have [only] a slim window … In most cases, where you have a civil war, as soon as you make a transition, you fall back into civil war. Syria is one of the few cases where [that has not happened]; we have survived."

This is where he starts to focus on Israel — of his own volition and, subsequently, in response to questions from the group and this reporter.

"I separate between what Netanyahu is thinking and doing," Idlbi says, "and the Israeli people and the Jewish people as a whole."

Generally, he assesses that "Netanyahu is leading Israel into a period of international isolation." Specifically, he accuses the prime minister of trying to utilize this summer's deadly fighting in Sweida "to create another war," and charges that while "many people in Israel want to turn the page, that is not shared by Netanyahu."

While Israel claims it is protecting the Druze, honoring a historical commitment to the community on the Israeli side of the border, he counters that the IDF targeted the new government's security forces in Sweida as they tried to restore calm, rather than those who were engaged in the sectarian violence. "Don't target us," he urges.

The Israeli government has also highlighted its imperative to ensure that Israel's northern border is not threatened by instability in southern Syria and a potential power vacuum that Iran and others would seek to exploit. Idlbi is thoroughly unpersuaded.

"Since December 8, the Netanyahu government has been the main threat to Syria," he charges, citing 900 attacks by the Israeli army inside Syria and asserting "zero threats from Syria to Israel."

Idlbi is adamant that "we want to establish security over the south … We want to see if we can have an arrangement where people feel secure on both sides of the border."

He says that "we understand the October 7 trauma for the Israeli people" and speaks of ultimately seeking "a peace deal based on the 1967 borders."

But this will all take time, he says. For now, he claims that "in our conversations with Israeli officials," it seems evident that "they don't want a stable Syria." Rather, he asserts, Netanyahu appears to want a reality in the south — near the Israeli border — where the Syrian government cannot exercise control.

This is a mistake from Israel's point of view, Idlbi argues. "We were lucky that we were able to push Iran and Hezbollah out of Syria on December 8 … But Iran is ready to step in," he warns. "Hezbollah is ready to step in." And thus, Netanyahu risks "creating the seeds for the next confrontation."

He also says Israel is seeking a Druze cross-

continued on page 6

48 hours in Damascus continues from page 5

border corridor, and this is something Syria cannot accept.

The new government, he says, is determined to "turn the page on non-state actors … There are 1.5 to 2 million fighters who have been engaged in fighting. That is not an easy situation to control." And therefore, he argues, "Anyone who is realistic enough can see that a stable Syria is actually in the interest first and foremost of Israel."

As we sit in the ministry, Israeli-Syrian negotiations are in full sway, with the U.S. administration reportedly seeking to finalize a new security agreement even before next week's United Nations General Assembly. Based on separation of forces agreements from half a century ago, this could reportedly provide specifics, as does the Israel-Egypt peace treaty, on where and how Syrian forces would be permitted to deploy in and near areas bordering Israel. (By the time we headed home from Syria the next day, Sharaa was stating that the talks could yield results "in the coming days.")

Idlbi is dismissive of the rumors that Sharaa might meet with Netanyahu on the sidelines of the General Assembly. "There is no plan for a meeting at the UN," he says.

He's probably right. Probably. But things are plainly moving fast behind the scenes.

When we return to the Foreign Ministry later Tuesday to meet Hamad Kara Ali, the newly appointed point man for issues of Jewish concern, Jajati praises the police for moving so fast to return the stolen doors of the Menarsha Synagogue and highlights the need for more security at Jewish sites.

Chitrik raises the case of Salim Jamous, secretary-general of the Jewish community of Beirut, who was abducted at the city's main synagogue in 1984 and has not been seen since. Perhaps, ventures Chitrik, the new Syrian government can help in this regard.

For that matter, I chime in, were the Syrian government to return the remains of iconic spy Eli Cohen, hanged in Damascus's Marjeh Square in 1965, all of Israel would marvel that this, today, is truly a different Syria.

"You spoke from the heart, and I heard it with my heart," Kara Ali says at the end of the session.

"Yes, but what are you going to *do*?" asks Schiffman.

"I'm listening to you, I'm taking notes, and we'll see how we can work together," says Kara Ali. ■

A2Vision: A brand-new Ann Arbor talent showcase!

By Eva Kubacki, Ann Arbor JCC

Get ready for a brand-new music program at the Ann Arbor JCC: A2Vision! This is a fun talent show, featuring singers, dancers, musicians, actors, and more from the Ann Arbor community. People of all ages and from all different parts of the Ann Arbor Jewish world will be showcasing their unique talents and performances, so come on down and show your support!

The event will take place on Thursday, February 12, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Ann Arbor JCC. The idea for this show comes from the popular music competition, Eurovision. While not a competition, A2Vision seeks to capture the same positive, fun energy, creativity, and unifying power of Eurovision.

A2Vision is free of charge to attend; however, please register in advance on JLive.app. ■

The JCC does its part to bring Universal Pre-K to Michigan

In September 2025, the JCC Early Childhood Center (ECC) took a big step in helping to move forward Governor Whitmer's goal of implementing Universal Pre-K in Michigan by 2028. Early in 2025, the state announced the expansion of the Great Start to Readiness Program (GSRP), which previously only provided no-cost Pre-K to at-risk four-year-olds. GSRP would be expanded to include all four-year-olds, regardless of risk factors, and private community early childhood programs would be gradually signed up to provide the needed spaces.

According to ECC Director Peretz Hirshbein, "Last February I learned that the Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD), which oversees publicly funded preschool in Washtenaw County, was selectively recruiting community early childhood programs to participate in GSRP in the 2025–26 school year." Hirshbein immediately contacted the WISD to ask for consideration for the ECC. In March, the ECC hosted WISD staff members as they toured the ECC and met with ECC staff, after which the ECC was invited to formally apply to be a GSRP site.

For ECC staff, maintaining the school's Jewish identity was essential throughout the process. "Getting a chance to meet with the WISD staff reassured us that our classrooms would be able to maintain their Jewish character," said Michelle Paris, ECC head preschool teacher. "All of my co-teachers thought this was important to preserving the unique work we do serving our families and community." Paris and Hirshbein made sure to point out that the Jewish education at the ECC is cultural, geographical, and values oriented, with very little falling into the category of religious education. The WISD staff agreed that the strong cultural basis of the program was a strength and not a weakness. Carrie Morris, the ECC's Curriculum Coordinator, who joined the program just as GSRP was taking off, notes that "Best practice in early childhood education calls for the embracing of the cultural practices of the families in a program, and the ECC's use of Jewish cultural practices enriches every day experiences the children have."

The alignment between GSRP expectations and the ECC's established practices helped make the transition possible. "The March meeting made us feel confident about our application because the ECC already used GSRP's preferred curriculum approach, child documentation and assessment tools, and we were already set up to provide lunch service," Hirshbein noted. Still, the timeline was ambitious. The ECC was accepted as a GSRP site in May, which left just four months to train JCC staff, sign parents up, and implement this program. "We all knew just how much of a blessing it would be for our families," Hirshbein reflects. "Everyone — teachers, administrators, finance staff — worked incredibly hard over the summer to get us ready. We were determined to make GSRP happen as early as possible."

When the school year started, all of the ECC's four-year-olds were receiving state-funded early childhood education from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and families were able to sign up for tuition-based care before and after those hours. The ECC's preschool classrooms started receiving monthly support visits from a WISD Early Childhood Specialist, easy access to a special needs consultant, and access to valuable professional development opportunities. And as the time went by over the fall, Paris noticed that "All the extra team planning time GSRP mandates has made our planning so much more intentional, which is making the experiences we design for our children richer and more meaningful."

For ECC families, the benefits have been both educational and deeply personal. One parent shared, "After both of us lost our jobs in 2025, GSRP became one of the only ways we could keep our children in the daycare we love and ensure that [our child] could remain in a classroom where he is thriving, surrounded by teachers and a community that cares deeply about him." While the family had previously been able to afford high quality child care without assistance, the experience was a powerful reminder how essential programs like GSRP are in expanding access to Early Childhood Education and supporting families through life's uncertainties.

"Research consistently shows that high quality early childhood education, like the ECC provides, leads to stronger academic performance, improved social-emotional skills, and long-term benefits like higher graduation rates and greater economic stability later in life," said Emily Rose, the ECC's Director of Operations. "GSRP helps us provide a road map to ensure that all families in our community have access to those benefits."

Shira and Peter Haderlein, parents of two ECC children, also saw GSRP strengthen elements of the ECC they already valued. Invitations to morning greeting time, home visits, shared meals, and increased investment in teacher development deepened their connection to the ECC. "Participating in GSRP has been an incredible opportunity for everyone involved — families and school faculty alike — to grow and learn together," said the Haderleins.

Erin Bzymek, also a parent of two ECC children, appreciates the effort the JCC made to not only provide this opportunity to the ECC's current families, but also to be part of this effort to bring high-quality early childhood education to all Michiganders, reflecting that, "We appreciate the opportunity to participate in GSRP this year and especially everything ECC leadership has done to launch this program. The teachers have done exceptional work making this a smooth transition for everyone. We look forward to more families benefiting from this important initiative from Governor Whitmer to expand access to preschool programs at lower cost across Michigan." The Haderleins agree, asserting that "This year has been a powerful reminder of how essential programs like GSRP are in expanding access to high-quality early childhood education — support that can have lasting impacts for children and families alike."

Throughout this process, the ECC has remained deeply committed to preserving the Jewish values, traditions, and sense of community that define its program. Curriculum Coordinator Morris sees the predictable weekly markers of time in a Jewish program — Havdalah, Shabbat, making challah — as giving children a sense of belonging and safety. From celebrating Jewish holidays and fostering a culture rooted in the JCC movement's values, the ECC's Jewish identity continues to shine brightly alongside the expansion of GSRP.

Families interested in joining the ECC should note the applications both for tuition-based enrollment and GSRP at the ECC open on March 1. For more information, and to join the ECC interest list, please visit the JCC website at jccannarbor.org and Washtenaw County's GSRP website at helpmegrowwashtenaw.org ■

Community

Doors wide open at HDS

By Orit Aviran

Sunday morning at Hebrew Day School was loud. Classes were off, yet the hallways filled with motion. In the newly renovated Music & Art Studio, a surprising crowd gathered — Hebrew Day School grandparents! We had grandparents of new Gansters who just recently joined the school, alongside legacy families like Florence and Marvin Gerber, Dina Shtull, and proud HDS father and grandfather Ron Sussman, who was also the instructor of this delightful gathering.

The Sababa club was born when we identified a need among our alumni families who want to stay connected and remain involved in the life of the school. These sessions offer adults meaningful Jewish community engagement while keeping them connected to our students and allow for intergenerational bonds and quality time.

This initiative joins our comprehensive community engagement programming: Taste of Gan monthly open houses for prospective kindergarten families, the new PJ Library Explorers outings throughout Ann Arbor, Parenting for Resilience workshops led by our school psychologist Dr. Beth Pearson, and so much more!

Community engagement at Hebrew Day School helps create diverse connections, fosters patience and respect, and showcases our school's values in action. Whether it's grandparents from the Sababa program, prospective families touring the Gan, or curious minds joining us for PJ Explorers — every participant becomes an ambassador for Jewish education and vibrant Jewish life.

These programs serve as welcoming entry points and a wonderful way to discover a Jewish life that is visible, active, intergenerational, and inclusive — the true spirit of Hebrew Day School!

Our students benefit deeply from this environment as well. They see their school as part of a larger ecosystem and experience firsthand what it means to be part of a thriving, multigenerational Jewish community.

As we open enrollment for the 2026–2027 school year, we continue to envision Hebrew Day School as an educational institution with doors open to all. We invite you to join our dynamic and diverse community, where you can enjoy not only exceptional academics, but also meaningful Jewish life experience.

Join us for Sababa, PJ Library Explorers, Parenting for Resilience, or schedule a school tour by visiting hdsaa.org or contact Orit Aviran at oaviran@hdsaa.org. ■

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With elected officials, representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties, civic leaders and educational advocates, we will gather and learn:

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- How can we join city or county commissions?
- How can we impact the quality of our local schools?
- How can we impact decisions made in my town, my county and my state?

Register on JLive Here:

The Jewish community has so much to contribute, and this evening will show us you how to get involved and make a difference by engaging in local issues that matter to you.

Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor
JCRC Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor

Sponsored by a grant from A More Perfect Union: Jewish Partnership for Democracy
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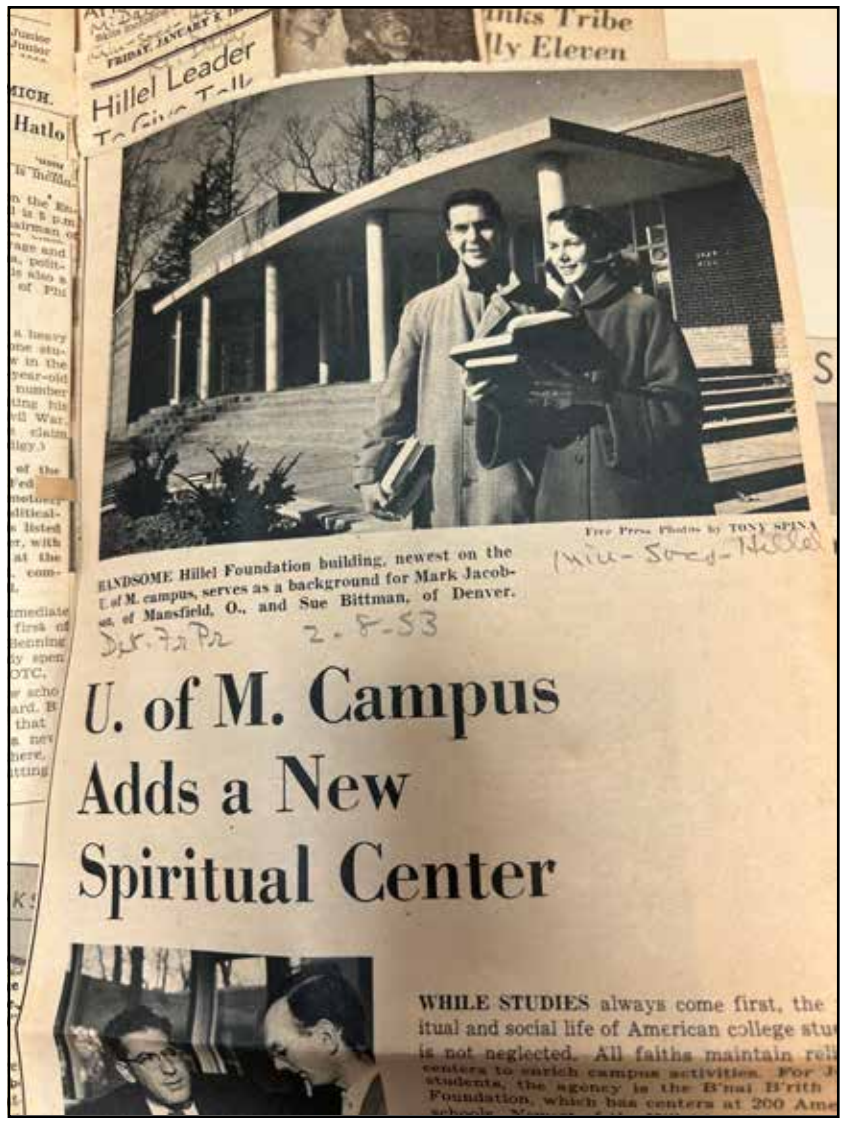

Hillel Leader

Free Press Photo by TONY SPINA

HANDSOME Hillel Foundation building, newest on the U. of M. campus, serves as a background for Mark Jacobs, of Mansfield, O., and Sue Bittman, of Denver.

2-8-53

U. of M. Campus Adds a New Spiritual Center

WHILE STUDIES always come first, the ...itual and social life of American college stu... is not neglected. All faiths maintain rel... centers to enrich campus activities. For J... students, the agency is the B'nai B'rith Foundation, which has centers at 200 Ame...

Michigan Hillel celebrates centennial

By Ari Smith

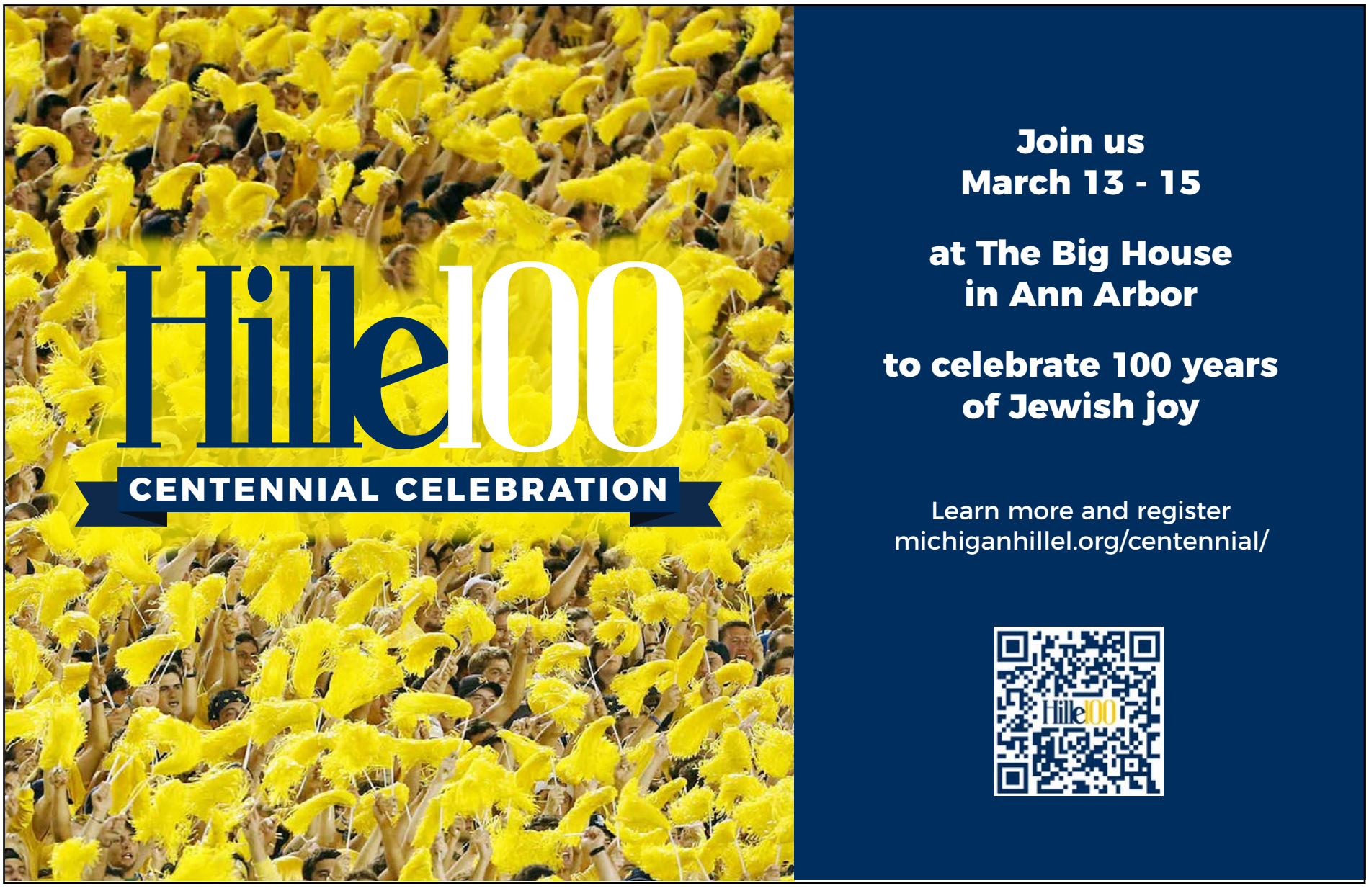
Few Ann Arbor residents are unaware that Michigan Hillel is the fourth-oldest Hillel in the country. Founded in 1926 to serve 500 Jewish students, it has grown over the last one hundred years to be a spiritual, educational, and community home for thousands each semester. On the weekend of March 13–15, Michigan Hillel will be celebrating their centennial with a full slate of festivities, from a "Mega Shabbat" on Friday evening to the Sunday Centennial Celebration, both hosted at Michigan Stadium.

The centennial weekend is produced by Wendy Shanker, an alumna of the University of Michigan. "I'm thrilled to be returning to Ann Arbor to help celebrate Hillel's 100th," said Shanker. "I gained some of my most valuable communication, leadership, and human skills through Hillel in the 1990s. My appreciation for Hillel's role in shaping the University of Michigan Jewish community motivates me to go all-out as we create this joyful celebration."

"This Centennial isn't just a party, it's a 'once-in-a-century' opportunity to reconnect and strengthen our community," adds Rabbi Davey Rosen, CEO of Michigan Hillel. "This weekend is intentionally designed to bolster relationships among current students, alumni, and the broader Jewish community."

At a time of rising antisemitism and division, it can feel that Michigan Hillel is facing its greatest challenge. Hillel does not exist in this single moment in time, however. As Rabbi Rosen says, "Historically, whatever is going on in the world, Hillel has been here, steadfastly committed to providing a spiritual home for our students where they can explore, learn, and lead." It has always been a living organization, striving to meet students where they are and finding ways to grow each generation of Jewish students.

Perhaps this is why a centennial is so important — it offers an opportunity to look forward as well as behind, to see the ways Michigan Hillel has served their community in times of peace and of fear, the changes over the years and the solidity of its values. The urgency of a single moment can often narrow our focus, but a look back reminds us of what has been accomplished, and what can be achieved in the future. ■



Chaldean Jewish Alliance holds kosher luncheon

In early January, the JCRC of the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor teamed up with the Chaldean community of Michigan to launch the Chaldean Jewish Alliance at a gala lunch at the Detroit Athletic Club (DAC). It was the largest kosher event ever hosted by the DAC, which now has a fully kosher kitchen. Among the 45 invited guests, who were split between the Jewish and Chaldean communities, were Rep. Jennifer Conlin of Ann Arbor and Oakland County Treasurer Robert Wittenberg. Rep. Morgan Foreman's office was represented by Legislative Aide Bassam Sayegh, a member of the Chaldean community.

Sam Yono, president of the International Chaldean Federation welcomed the group, followed by an introduction by Rabbi Asher Lopatin, co-chair of the Alliance and Community Relations Director of the Greater Ann Arbor Jewish Federation. Thomas Dobish, a leader with the International Chaldean Federation, gave a fascinating presentation of the deep historical and familial connections between the Jewish and Chaldean communities. Film producer and director Weam Namou spoke about her hopes for deeper relationships between the communities to address common concerns.

Vince Yadloo, a Chaldean community businessman, summed up the feelings of many in the room saying "Today was a very special day. We appreciate your efforts, and I am very excited for the future!"

The Alliance is committed to developing programs and events and engaging in advocacy which helps both communities benefit from one another and the wider community all over Michigan. For more information, contact Rabbi Asher Lopatin (asher@jewishannarbor.org). ■

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit lsa.umich.edu/judaic for more information

Hebrew and the Machine: When Ancient Language Meets Modern Technology
Panelists: Ido Ramati (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Cara Rock-Singer (U-M)
Tuesday, February 10 | 5:00 - 6:30 PM
Room 2022, South Thayer Building

Jewish Journalism in Dark Times
Panelists: Naomi Brenner (Ohio State University), Gilad Halpern & Matt Handleman (25-26 Frankel Institute Fellows)
Tuesday, February 24 | 5:00 - 6:30 PM
Room 2022, South Thayer Building

Hasidic Women in the Media: A Lecture-Performance
Guest Speaker: Jessica Roda (Georgetown University)
Performer: Malchy Goldman
Tuesday, March 17 | 5:00 - 6:30 PM
Room 2022, South Thayer Building

We are pleased to provide reasonable accommodations to enable full participation in this event. Please contact js-event-coord@umich.edu to request disability accommodations or with any questions/concerns.

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JEWS OF COLOR:
ONE TERM, MANY COMMUNITIES

With Professor Samira Mehta

February 16, 2026, 7:00pm
Student Center, Room 300
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Jewish People of Color of Greater Ann Arbor — The Network

for questions to contact jewish.studies@emich.edu

Kosher Cuisine

Savory Sephardi specialties

By Lonnie Sussman

I'm sure the weather in Michigan in February will be lovely. Okay, there will probably be some chill, or snow, or rain, or grey skies. Still, we can look forward to one Jewish holiday, in addition to the weekly Shabbat. It's Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish holiday for trees. One of the ways to celebrate is making food that includes the seven sacred species mentioned in the Torah. I've included a recipe for salad using those foods.

I'm also focusing on some Sephardi recipes for February because I'm inspired by the book *Isabella's Way*, written by Ann Arbor's own Barbara Stark-Nemon. The book is historical fiction with incredibly detailed research. The setting begins in Portugal in the 1600s during the Spanish Inquisition. The story is about a remarkable 14-year-old and some of her friends and their journeys to escape persecution. Descriptions of her life, the dangerous routes taken to reach Hamburg Germany where her father is, and the people who helped along this hazardous route are compelling. The descriptions of the landscapes are stunning. The art of embroidery plays a large role in this story and some of the designs are featured on the front cover of the book. These images include some of the signs that Isabella uses in her journey to make beautiful clothing and coded messages for the people helping the persecuted people.

A Salad for Tu B'Shvat

Based on *King Solomon's Table* by Joan Nathan

Serves 8–10

"*For the Lord your G-d is bringing you into a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey*." Deuteronomy, 8:7–10.

Try a salad with these ingredients.

- ¾ cup wheat berries with ½ tsp salt
- ¾ cup pearl barley
- ½ cup dates, chopped (The honey mentioned in the Bible is silan, date honey)
- ½ cup figs, chopped
- 1 cup grapes, green or red or a mix
- 5 scallions, sliced thin
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 cup chopped parsley or basil, or a mix
- 1 cup olives, pitted and chopped
- ½ cup pomegranate seeds
- 2 big handfuls of salad greens
- Optional, add 1 cup of feta or goat cheese, crumbled.

Fill a medium saucepan with water and add the wheat berries and salt. Bring to a boil and simmer about 10 minutes. Then add the barley and simmer uncovered for another 20 minutes or until both grains are almost al dente. Drain, rinse under cold water to stop the cooking, and transfer to a large bowl. Stir in the fruits and add scallions, garlic (optional), parsley, olives, and pomegranates. Put the greens on a flat serving plate and cover with the rest of the ingredients in the bowl or mix everything in the large bowl. Add the cheese if you are using it. Toss with your favorite balsamic and olive oil dressing.

Portuguese Fish Stew/Caldeirada de Peixe

From the Fearless Eating Blog online

Serves 4 but feel free to double the recipe if you have a large enough pot.

- 4 pounds fresh fish, cod and/or salmon work as do any firm fish that can hold up for cooking with liquids.
- 1 large onion, sliced into circles or chopped
- 8 cloves of garlic (this is the original recipe, but you know your eaters. 2 are enough for me.)
- 1 green pepper and 1 red, both sliced or chopped
- 1 lb tomatoes or 1 can
- 1 lb potatoes, sliced or chopped or use the small round potatoes
- 1 cup white wine
- 1 cup fish stock (or my favorite, Zoup brand Vegan Stock)
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tbs paprika (smoked or sweet, your choice)
- 2 bay leaves
- Chili powder or flakes or a hot sauce (or no chili for my family)
- Pinch of salt
- Fresh parsley or cilantro for serving in a bowl as garnish

Use your big pot and add a little olive oil and ½ of the onions and garlic, and half the peppers and sauté for about 5 minutes. Then add ½ the tomatoes, then ½ the potatoes, then ½ the fish. Add the next layer the same way and then add the wine and broth and olive oil so the ingredients are covered in the liquid. Raise the temperature to a boil and then lower it to a gentle simmer for 20 to 30 minutes. Make sure the potatoes are cooked through. Serve with rice or another grain and add the parsley or cilantro for the garnish.

Kosher Cachupa, hearty stew

Michael Twitty's take on Cape Verde stew, published in *Saveur* magazine, adapted from *Kosher Soul*

Serves 4.

Here's another version of a Sephardi dish. Some of the refugees escaping the Inquisition found safety on Cape Verde, an island nation off the coast of West Africa.

- 3 tbs olive oil, divided, plus more if needed
- 1 medium yellow onion, coarsely chopped (1½ cups)
- 4 garlic cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- 6 to 8 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 15-oz can white hominy, drained (hominy is dried field corn kernels, soaked and cooked in a solution of limewater). If you can't find it, add canned corn.
- 1 15-oz can kidney beans, drained
- ½ cup frozen lima beans
- 1 lb kosher beef or lamb bacon, cut into small cubes
- 2 cups coarsely chopped green cabbage or kale
- 1 large russet potato, and 1 large sweet potato, each peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes, (2 cups each)
- 1 medium plantain, peeled and thinly sliced into ½ inch thick rounds (1 cup) (another ingredient we don't often see in our grocery stores. Leave it out if you can't find any).
- ½ medium butternut squash or other winter squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes (1 cup)
- ¼ cup green beans, sliced lengthwise
- 5 ½ pounds whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces (or buy chicken already cut up)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 medium plum tomatoes, quartered
- ½ cup sofrito (can be found at Trader Joe's)

Use a large pot (duh, 5 pounds of chicken!). On medium heat, add 2 tbs olive oil along with the onions, garlic, and bay leaves until the onions are translucent and fragrant, and add 6 cups of broth. Stir in the hominy, kidney beans, and lima beans and bring to a boil, and then turn heat down to simmer until the beans are tender, about 45 minutes. Turn heat off and set aside. Add the beef and kosher bacon to a large skillet at medium heat to render a little of their fat, and then add the cabbage, plantain, squash, green beans, and both types of potatoes. Stir occasionally until cabbage wilts, about 20 minutes. Transfer all of this to the large pot, wipe the skillet clean and add the remaining tbs of olive oil. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and add the pieces in batches to lightly brown them on all sides. This should take another 14 minutes per batch. Then put all the chicken in the big pot and add the tomatoes. Add more broth to submerge the chicken if needed. Set over low heat and cook for about an hour, stirring occasionally and skimming any foam off the surface. Stir in the sofrito and continue cooking until the chicken is very tender, about 20 more minutes. Remove from heat and set aside to cool, add the broth to thicken. The cachupa can be served warm or at room temperature. Ladle into large wide bowl.

Yam Akpessi-Ivorian Eggplant and Yam

Vegan Africa by Marie Kacouchia

Serves 4

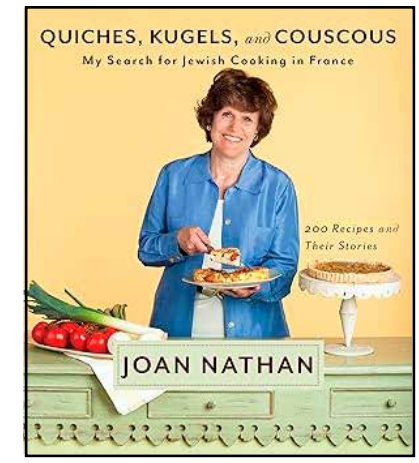
Prep time 30 minutes and cook time 1 hour.

- 2 large eggplants (the purple kind)
- 2 tomatoes
- 1 small sweet red pepper
- 2 yellow onions
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 tbs vegetable oil
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- 2 tbs tomato paste
- 1 vegetable stock cube, crumbled
- 1 yam (or sweet potato), peeled and chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add the eggplants and cook until tender (15 minutes). Slice an X into the bottom of each tomato and add to the pot after the eggplants have been cooking for 5 minutes. Strain both vegetables and let cool. Then, peel and chop the tomatoes and the eggplants. Add them plus the red pepper to a food processor and puree until smooth. Transfer to a bowl. Cut the first onion into chunks and place it and the garlic in the food processor and puree until smooth. Chop the second and add to a large pot with the oil over medium heat. Add in purees of eggplants and tomatoes and the onion puree, the ginger and tomato paste, the stock cube and ½ cup of water. Stir, reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is thickened, about 20 minutes. While that's cooking, place the yam or sweet potato in a pot and cover with water, season with salt, and boil it until easily pierced with a fork. Check the seasonings of the eggplant sauce and serve with the boiled potato on the side.

Cassolita/Winter Squash with Caramelized Onions

Quiches, Kugels, and Couscous by Joan Nathan



Serves 8

Cassola refers to a round clay pot used to bake this. This recipe is more of a side dish than a main dish. My family loved it.

- 2 lb Butternut or Kabocha squash, halved lengthwise, and seeded
- 3 tbs vegetable oil
- ½ cup slivered almonds
- 2 pounds onions, peeled and sliced thinly into rounds
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- 2 tsp plus an optional 1 tbs sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place the squash, cut side down, on a rimmed baking sheet. Add ¼ cup water, cover with aluminum foil, and bake until the squash is very soft, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and when cooled, scoop out the pulp into a large bowl. Heat the oil in a large skillet, toss in the almonds, cook until golden. Use a slotted spoon and remove them to a plate and set aside. Sauté the onions in the same skillet over medium heat until translucent. Then add the salt to taste, 2 tbs of parsley, 2 tsp sugar, the cinnamon, and the raisins, and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, for about 30 minutes or until they are caramelized. Gently fold the onions into the squash and season with more salt and pepper, if you wish. Sprinkle with more parsley and the almonds and the extra sugar, if you want it. Serve hot. ■

Restaurant review

Cuppy's: Where community feeds your soul

By Candace Bulkley and Trina Fuller

Candace and Trina became friends in the Temple Beth Emeth adult b-mitzvah class that graduated in 2022. They will be honing their palates, visiting, and writing about a variety of independent, locally owned Washtenaw County restaurants, catering to a variety of dietary preferences

Along a magical mile of Washtenaw Avenue, heading east from Ann Arbor to Ypsilanti, you can travel the world on a plate. One night you can find yourself in Thailand, the next in Honduras, or perhaps Northern Africa. Or you may recognize the feeling of wanting home cooking after travelling. Cook if you must — but we suggest heading over to Cuppy's Best Soul Food to find a taste of comfort and home.

Cuppy's got their start in a gas station on Ecorse Road and steadily grew a loyal following. Owner Andrea "Cuppy" Thomas told us that she had outgrown the space and had an excellent opportunity to expand her operations and where she didn't have to worry about someone running into a gas pump and causing an explosion! Thankfully, that never happened, but she seized the opportunity to move into a larger space to focus primarily on catering. The public had different thoughts about Cuppy's being a catering-only establishment and demanded she open up the dining room. So she did. Based on the full dining room, happy customers we encountered, and our own delicious meal, we can say a collective thank you!

When you hear "soul food" you may assume pork will be on the menu. Cuppy's is different — there is no pork on their menu, and all of the side dishes are vegetarian, so it fits many dietary lifestyles. Although we didn't try any of the vegan items, there is a sizable selection to explore as well.

We were warmly greeted upon entering the restaurant by staff and customers alike and were seated in a corner booth. In addition to the usual tables and booths, there is a counter with stools that is a front row seat to watch the kitchen staff at work, perfect for solo diners and those who want to engage with the staff as they fill orders.

While we perused the menu, we put in an order for "angel eggs," also known as deviled eggs. It is unusual to find them in a restaurant and, better yet, we didn't have to make them! Four half eggs arrived generously filled with a slightly sweet golden yolk puree. Although the plating was underwhelming with the eggs sitting atop of some sad looking lettuce, we thoroughly enjoyed them and they took the edge off while we decided on our entrees.

We were drawn to the list of sides. There were so many and most of them sounded so delicious that we let them guide our meal rather than the usual entree choice. Each entree includes a choice of 2 sides and a piece of cornbread. By unanimous decision, we were ordering the fried chicken and wanted to try one other entree. Our server steered us towards the grilled turkey chops, which intrigued us because we had never heard of them. That wasn't enough, so we added the Veggie Platter, which is literally four sides. That makes a total of eight side-order servings we had coming our way.

From the list of sides, it might be easier to list the ones we didn't choose rather than the ones that appeared on our table. By far, the biggest winner was the macaroni & cheese which appeared to have been baked in muffin cups and was light and fluffy — we later confirmed that it contained eggs to help give it softness and loft. It was a good thing we ordered two portions or we may have had to fight for the last bites. We also tried the baked beans, which had a touch of sweetness, and were delicious with no pork to worry about. The fresh tasting coleslaw was tangy but perhaps a bit too sweet for our tastes. The candied yams were as described and we appreciated they were still firmly intact and not doused in a super sugary sauce.

We ordered two of the vegetables — the collard greens and the cabbage. Our bubbly server broke the bad news that they were out of collards, so we had to make another selection and went for the spaghetti with meat sauce. As we were eating, a dish of collards appeared — brought out just as the batch was finished cooking — bringing us now to eight different sides.

The collard greens were surprisingly good. They were tender and were less vinegary than others we have had before. The braised cabbage which was mildly seasoned, was an endearing homestyle dish and a toss-up. One enjoyed it, the other not so much — it was definitely a case of personal preference. Spaghetti and meat sauce was interesting and had a flavor reminiscent of sloppy joes. It was not "Italian style" but "Soul style" — one of us couldn't stop eating it!

With so many different side items to choose from, we decided against the fries. Instead, we chose the fried okra, also a toss-up. The small nuggets of breaded okra arrived piping hot. However, we asked for some ranch dressing to dip them in, and that made them even better.

As mentioned earlier we ordered the three-piece fried chicken, and we were able to choose the pieces we liked — two thighs and a breast. The chicken arrived hot and was fried to a beautiful crisp golden brown. The three thin cut white meat turkey chops arrived on the bone and the charred salt and pepper flavor of the meat was delicious. The chops were dry but that is the nature of turkey. Taken off the bone it would have made a tasty sandwich on a nice roll with condiments — had we any left over, that would have been its second act.

We were able to find just enough room left to share a dessert. After consulting with our server, we chose the peach cobbler. It was a lovely nutmeg-kissed sweet treat that needed vanilla ice cream, which we foolishly declined. At the end of our meal, Mrs. Cuppy came out and talked to us about our meal, hospitality, the joys and struggles of being a small business owner. She made it clear that the customers were the purpose of their work at Cuppy's. She said "without them we are nothing." We felt that sentiment from the moment we walked in. This restaurant is a labor of love for the community and worthy of a visit for some comfort food and genuine hospitality.

Cuppy's is open Thursday–Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. In addition to the sit-down restaurant, they offer catering and can accommodate any size group — including the University of Michigan football team!

Cuppy's Best Soul Food

2469 Washtenaw Ave., Ypsilanti ■

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Tu B'Shvat as a bridge

By Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador

At a time when many Jews feel fractured — by politics, by ideology, or by communal boundaries — Tu B'Shvat offers a powerful counter-narrative. Known as the "New Year of the Trees," this holiday invites us to slow down, notice what is growing, and remember our shared roots. More than a seasonal marker, Tu B'Shvat centers values that are urgently needed right now: interdependence, renewal, gratitude, and care for the earth and for one another.

This year in Ann Arbor, Tu B'Shvat is being celebrated through collaboration across the local Jewish community. On Sunday, February 1, community members of all ages will gather at the JCC for a daytime Tu B'Shvat celebration that brings together multiple organizations and perspectives. There will be a variety of arts/craft/planting activities in the JCC Newman Lounge. Shlomit Cohen, the director of the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC) Beit Sefer (religious school), is part of the community-wide programming for Tu B'Shvat. "One of the activities that we are excited to offer is bringing the different colors from nature and making colorful fun tie-dye with the children," she says. Please see the article on page 13 for more details.

Later on February 1, at 7 pm, a different kind of collaboration will unfold. Clergy and members from the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal communities will come together to lead a joint Tu B'Shvat seder, drawing on traditional ritual structures while inviting creativity, song, and reflection.

What makes this collaboration especially meaningful is Jewish Renewal and Reconstructing Judaism have a lot of affinity. Both are deeply engaged with tradition yet embrace the opportunity to reinterpret it in light of modern life. Both emphasize ethical responsibility, spiritual depth, inclusivity, and a Judaism that speaks to the heart as well as the mind.

At the same time, their differences add texture to the collaboration. Jewish Renewal often foregrounds embodied spirituality, music, mysticism, and ecstatic prayer while Reconstructing Judaism emphasizes historical consciousness, democratic process, and thoughtful engagement with evolving Jewish civilization. When these approaches meet, and they often do, the result is not dilution, but enrichment providing multiple doorways into shared Jewish life.

Rabbi Elliot Ginsburg of Pardes Hannah, Ann Arbor's Jewish Renewal chevre, notes, "the Seder for Tu B'Shvat invites us to experience an expansive understanding of the divine life-force while helping us appreciate the deep ecology of our own lives. The Tu B'Shvat Seder historically draws on kabbalistic understandings of divinity as a Tree of Life with its roots in the Infinite. In this model, earthly life may be seen as leaves and fruit on the tree, energetically connected to the Source. From an ecological perspective, Tu B'Shvat, with its imagery of roots and branches, soil and fruit, reminds us that healthy ecosystems depend on diversity. So do healthy communities. When Jews gather across lines of denomination and ideology, we model a Judaism

Continues on page 13

Tu B'Shvat continues from pg 12

that is resilient, relational, and alive."

In a season when public discourse so often pushes us toward division, these Tu B'Shvat gatherings invite something else: to come together, to plant seeds of connection, and to celebrate what can grow when we choose collaboration over separation.

Rabbi Aura Ahuvia, who has strong roots in Ann Arbor's Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal communities, states: "I've felt a rising need for community with every passing month. The news, social media … it all feels oppressive and manipulative. I've been seeking the salve of simple connection, to be reminded that when we come together, in person, as ourselves, we're capable of enjoying each other's company and even solving our problems together. Celebrating life as it reawakens within and between us feels like exactly the right thing to do right now."

It is great to see an additional February 1 Tu B'Shvat collaboration between Beth Israel Congregation and the A2J Climate Circle. We embrace the many meaningful community collaborations on the horizon for 2026.

AARC events for February

For more information about services or events or to receive Zoom links, please email: info@aarecon.org. Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation website: aarecon.org

February 1
Tu B'Shvat Seder with Pardes Hannah. 7 p.m.

February 8
Book Club. We will be discussing *The Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Swe*et by Jamie Ford. For more information about the book club meeting and the amazing lunch that precedes it, email Greg, gsaltzman@albion.edu. 1 p.m.–2 p.m.

February 14
Second Saturday Morning Shabbat Service/ Climate Shabbat. Meditation with Anita Rubin-Meiller. 10 a.m. This is a hybrid Shabbat Service led by our Rabbi, Gabrielle Pescador, at the JCC and on Zoom. Service is followed by a nut-free potluck. Zoom link will be sent out the week before the event. 10:30 a.m.–noon.

February 18
Rosh Chodesh Adar Minyan. 9 a.m.
Pop-In Torah Study on Zoom. This is an hour led by our Rabbi. 7–8 p.m.

February 27
Fourth Friday Kabbalat Shabbat. This is a hybrid service led by Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador in person at the JCC and on Zoom. Everyone is welcome! Service is followed by a nut-free potluck. 6:30 p.m. ■

Community Tu B'Shvat Program at the JCC

By Peretz Hirshbein, Director of Child and Family Programs, Ann Arbor JCC

The Birthday of the Trees is here! Tu B'Shvat marks the day on which trees are considered a year older, as established by the rabbis who compiled the Talmud. In recent years, Tu B'Shvat has taken on new meaning, as the Jewish community has associated the holiday with environmentalism and responsible stewardship of our world.

Join us at the Jewish Community Center on Sunday, February 1, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. for a community event celebrating Tu B'Shevat. The JCC is joined by community partners Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor, Camp Tavor, the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation, and Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor to present a wide variety of activities related to celebrating trees. Participants can taste different fruits at a self-guided Tu B'Shvat Seder, make environmentally friendly bird feeders, plant parsley to be ready for Passover, sing Tu B'Shvat songs with the Shinshimim, learn some Israeli folk dances, hear readings of PJ Library Tu B'Shvat books, tie dye materials with natural dyes, and make bookmarks using dried flowers and plants.

Registration for the event is free, and can be found on JLive.app.

For more information, please contact Peretz Hirshbein at peretzhirshbein@jccannarbor.org ■

A2J Climate Circle

A local hero in the race against waste

Interview of Eva Solomon by Annie Wolock, A2J CC

On any given weekend in southeast Michigan, hundreds of runners line up for a race: bibs pinned, sneakers tied, and hearts pumping. What most participants never see is the quiet, intentional work happening behind the scenes to make sure the event doesn't leave behind mountains of trash. That effort is being led locally by Eva Solomon of Ann Arbor, founder of Epic Races, and it has made her something of a quiet climate hero.

Epic Races was founded in 2008 to meet a growing need for women-centered athletic events. From the beginning, environmental responsibility was part of its mission, but over time, that value has evolved into something much more concrete: producing zero-waste races. For the past eight years, Epic has partnered with Jeff from Happy Planet Running, the person Eva calls the "magic" behind their waste systems, to transform what could be a landfill-heavy operation into one that diverts nearly everything away from trash.

This didn't happen overnight. It required careful planning, persistence, and sometimes pushing back on sponsors. When a beverage sponsor supplied paper cups lined with wax, Epic advocated for compostable alternatives. When a food sponsor distributed single-serve yogurt in plastic containers that had to be washed before recycling, the team decided: never again. Now, everything is planned with end-of-life in mind. Volunteers sort single-stream recycling, compost is clearly separated, and waste is treated not as inevitable, but as something to be actively designed out.

One clear example is the Ann Arbor Marathon, one of Epic's flagship events. This year, the results were striking: only 2.4% of the waste went to landfill, while 20.8% was composted and 76.8% recycled. What still ends up in landfills is mostly the unavoidable stuff: wet wipes, diapers, and ice cream wrappers. (If someone brings a baby along and leaves a diaper behind, it becomes part of the waste stream.)

Eva's motivation is deeply personal. As a young person, she learned about the climate crisis long before it was mainstream. Later, when her children were small, they became the ones urging their parents to recycle, reuse, and reduce; even swapping paper napkins for cloth at home. Before launching Epic Races, Eva also taught at Ann Arbor's Hebrew Day School, where she helped lead the school to become green-certified, and green practices continue to be a part of the school culture.

That thread, education, responsibility, and care runs straight through Jewish values. The principle of bal tashchit forbids needless waste. Tikkun olam calls on us to repair the world, not exploit it. Epic Races embodies both: showing that even large, complex events can be run with mindfulness and restraint.

In a time when the climate crisis can feel overwhelming, Eva's work offers something quietly radical: proof that change doesn't only come from policy or protest. Sometimes it comes from a race director, a sorting station, and a belief that how we gather matters just as much as why. ■

Climate Action Shabbat Services

By Rena Basch, AARC

The A2J Climate Circle (A2JCC) and A2JCC partner Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC) are hosting our next climate action Shabbat services on Saturday, February 14, at 10 a.m. at the Jewish Community Center. AARC's Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador will lead services. Potluck vegetarian lunch at 12 p.m. to follow services. All are invited.

February 14 (27 Shevat 5786) is Shabbat Shekalim, a special Shabbat occurring before or on the first day of the Hebrew month of Adar when we read some verses (Exodus 30:11–16) from parshat Ki Tisa about the mandatory half-shekel contribution to the mishkan. Rav Gav teaches that these verses remind us to contribute to the betterment of the community/planet. Come share your love of the earth, love of Shabbat and love of community, and hopefully learn a little something new about how Jewish teachings support climate tikkun olam.

Hope you can join A2JCC on Saturday, Feb 14, at 10 a.m. at the JCC, 2935 Birch Hollow Dr. Please bring a nut-free, vegetarian dish to pass for lunch. Sign up at https://bit.ly/A2JCCFeb14 ■

From storm damage to native bloom

By Phil Barr, Temple Beth Emeth, Co-Chair Grounds, Genesis of Ann Arbor

The ice and snowstorms of February 2023 left Ann Arbor streets littered with debris for months. Out of that destruction, the Genesis Native Michigan Plants Garden was born this past spring.

Gaining access to seeds collected from the previous season and learning how to care for them.

Creating mini greenhouses to sprout the seeds.

Repotting and finally planting the seedlings in the new garden.

Why Native Plants?

Native plants are built for our climate. Once established, they out-compete weeds and require significantly less water, fertilizer, and maintenance than traditional landscaping. They also provide essential food and habitat for local birds and pollinators.

The goal for the garden is to have all plantings be indigenous to our region. After scraping the area and removing existing landscaping fabric this spring, the trees and plants of the new garden replaced overgrown landscaping that had been planted decades earlier and was suffering from acid rain and storm damage.

During our planning, we learned about Seeds To Community, part of the Stewardship Network. Their mission is to "create connections with people and nature through the process of growing native plants from seed." Partnering with them enabled us to learn the whole process of bringing a garden to life, including:

Learning which native plants were the right fit for our specific height, shade, and moisture needs.

This partnership allowed us to tap into a great source of knowledge and grow thousands of plants at almost no cost. As a long-time gardener, I appreciated the simplicity of sowing seeds in hundreds of mini greenhouses made of reused gallon milk jugs. These were left outside in the snow, sun, and rain over the winter until they were ready to sprout in the spring.

Seeds To Community volunteers have prepared a curated spreadsheet of over 100 native Michigan varieties, each tagged with specific sunlight and moisture requirements.

Experience our progress along a 200-foot stretch of Eastover, east of Packard. We invite you to reach out for a guided tour of the grounds and see how this 50-year partnership between St. Clare's and Temple Beth Emeth continues to grow.

Genesis of Ann Arbor was formed 50 years ago as a partnership between St. Clare's Episcopal Church and Temple Beth Emeth. Gardens tended by dedicated congregants surround it. ■

Sara O'Donnell Adler

Tu B'Shevat

In the dead of winter, I walk in a valley
of trees, under boughs bare and brittle,
amid deer-browsed bark, and *caw* of crows.

In the middle of *Shevat*, in the middle
of snow, in the midst of twilight, at the end
and in the beginning of a new year for trees,
the moon rises pregnant and orange in faint

cobalt light. In the land of Israel, it is taught
that in the middle of *Shevat,* the sap of trees
begins to rise, adds another ring into ancient
record of wood. Soon, the almond will flower.

We celebrate the cedar and the oak,
the olive and citron, the fig and tart wine
of pomegranate, the milk and the honey.

But here, in the middle of *Shevat*,
in the month my father died, the trees
hold frost on their shoulders. I say a prayer
that the sap here will also rise in memory
of all that I've loved. May it rise through

veins of maple so I may tap its sweetness.
So that I, too, will be lifted through roots,
through sturdy trunk, through the branches,
toward buds that clutch spring in their fists
and reach upward toward the light.

Rabbi Adler is a Staff Chaplain at the University of Michigan Hospitals and is a Certified Michigan Naturalist

Emma Goldman, superstar? The Jewish anarchist has a surprising role to play in American musical theater

By PJ Grisar. This story was originally published in the Forward on January 9. To get the Forward's free email newsletters delivered to your inbox, go to https://forward.com/newsletter-signup/.

Lately I've been thinking about Emma Goldman, the Russian-born Jewish anarchist who attracted droves of followers in her 30-plus years in the United States. I've not really been focused on her place in history writ large, more her surprisingly robust soap box in the world of musical theater. For all her import to the American left, on Broadway she's mostly a bit part. And that bothers me.

Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's *Ragtime,* now in a lauded revival at Lincoln Center, devotes a song to her 1906 speech at Union Square. From there she interprets the subtext of a meeting between the WASPy, rich character "Younger Brother" and Black pianist Coalhouse Walker Jr. As a featured player, minus ensemble numbers, she's in the mix for less than 10 minutes — she features more in E.L. Doctorow's novel.

When I saw the Encores production at New York's City Center last year, I remembered that Goldman has a cameo in Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins;* in a brief encounter that would later haunt her, she hands a pamphlet to William McKinley's future assassin Leon Czolgosz. Her role there, played by a member of the ensemble who doubles other parts, is even smaller.

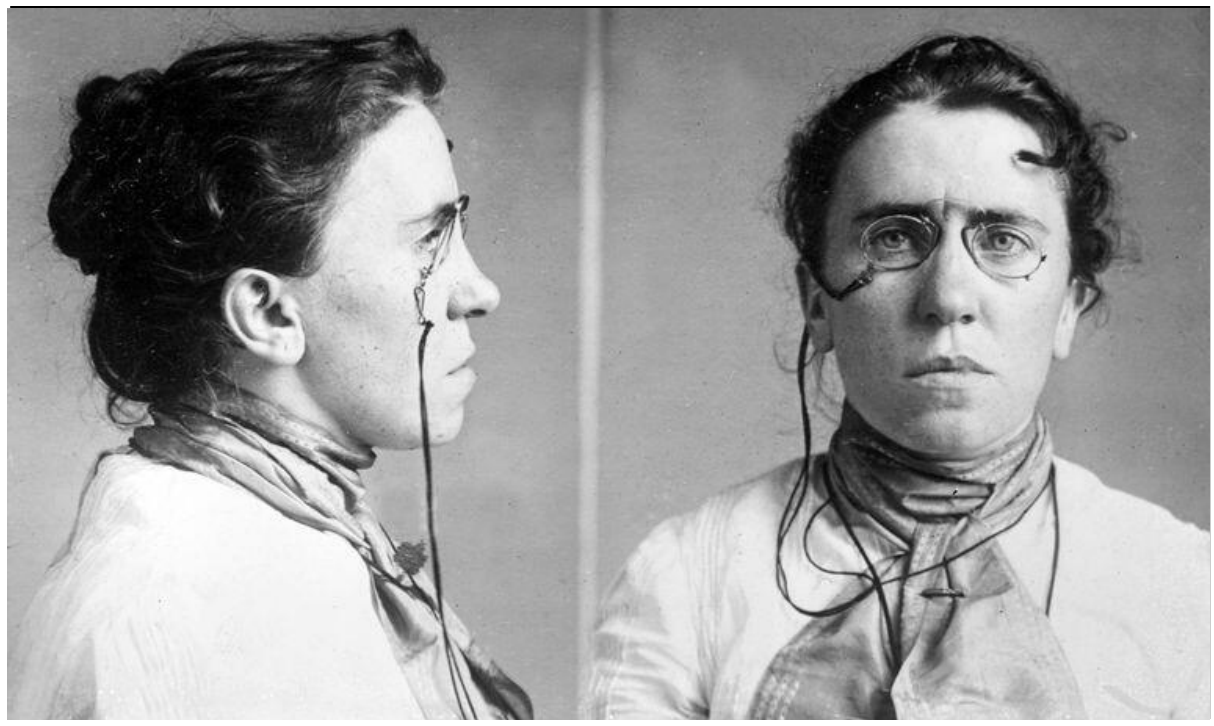
While on vacation in Colorado over New Year's (I skied; the chair lift conked me in the head), I got an email about an upcoming production of a chamber opera called *E.G.: A Musical Portrait of Emma Goldman*. I had to know more. Was she finally getting her due?

The piece, which began performances at Theater for the New City on January 8, is by composer Leonard Lehrman and librettist Karen Ruoff Kramer. It's actually not new at all, just the most recent production of a story they've been telling — or gospel they've been spreading — for over 40 years. To date they've presented the piece, together with educational slides, in five countries, at universities and synagogues, for groups like the Workers Circle and to mark important anniversaries, like the centennial of the Haymarket Riot that helped radicalize Goldman. They believe the work is more topical than ever.

"She's talking about how war drains the economy from everything else, and militarism, to stay alive, will look for an enemy or even create one artificially," said Lehrman, whose piece features him on piano and acting as Goldman's lover, friend, and partner Alexander Berkman. (Caryn Hartglass plays the title role.)

"It's happening right now," added Lehrman, "the creation of an enemy in order to distract from domestic failure."

Lehrman and Kramer began work on the musical in 1984, first basing it on historian Howard Zinn's play *Emma*. As the pair researched Goldman's life, the story took a different tack. The pair met as expats in Germany, and, given that connection, gravitated toward her life in exile, which began in 1919 when the U.S. deported her as a radical "alien." The action of the piece tells her life story through the various parts of a visa application she filled out from St. Tropez in 1933. (The section on the form for "name" deals with identity and her marriages for which she took other surnames; for "sex" she offers the Austin Powers "Yes, please" — though Lehrman and Kramer wrote it first — and goes on like that, even covering her 1916 arrest at the Forward building for giving a talk about birth control.)



Emma Goldman

"I need America," she says in the opening moments. "And I need to know: Does America need *me* now?"

It makes a certain sense for Goldman to express her ideas through song. *Les Miserables*, if nothing else, has shown the anthemic potential of staging a revolution. (Its signature anthem shows up in real-world protests with some regularity.)

Goldman is credited with saying, "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution," a quotable that gets its own number in Lehrman's musical. Speaking over Zoom, Lehrman wore a shirt with those words and a portrait of Goldman.

Lehrman noted that in addition to his opera, there are two other ones about Goldman they know of — one by Elaine Fine, made in collaboration with Zinn, and another by Canadian composer Gary Kulesha.

Given her radical bona fides and thoughts about capitalism, some may wonder if Goldman might clash with the format of musical drama. We don't have too much to go on for musicals, as the form as we now know it arguably wasn't established until around 13 years before her death, with *Showboat* (it debuted in 1927, after her deportation; one suspects she would approve of how it addressed racial prejudice).

In her time, opera for the bourgeois and Vaudeville for the masses were popular musical entertainment. While Goldman turned down offers to appear on Vaudeville stages, Samantha M. Cooper, professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Kansas, observed in a 2023 lecture, Goldman was a fan — if also a critic — of opera, writing about it with some frequency in her magazine *Mother Earth*, and even in a lecture notes in admiration of Richard Wagner.

Cooper argues that perhaps Goldman's most pivotal reference to opera comes in her memoir, *Living My Life*. In it Goldman recounts how, after watching a performance of *Carmen* at the Met, her mentor Johann Most asked her to recall her first experience at the opera in Königsberg.

She vividly recounted seeing *Il trovatore* as a school girl, where she "first realized the ecstasy music could create in me." Hearing her impassioned reflection, Most told Goldman she had talent and must "begin soon to recite and speak in public."

"He grinned and emptied his glass to my 'first public speech,'" Goldman recalled.

Could it be that we have opera, then, to thank for Emma Goldman's oratory, and so, her future presence in musicals?

E.G. makes clear that the firebrand activist is not so unidimensional as *Ragtime* and *Assassins* make her seem. Her life was limned with contradictions. She enjoyed the finer things — and also railed against fatcat industrialists up to the point of attempted murder.

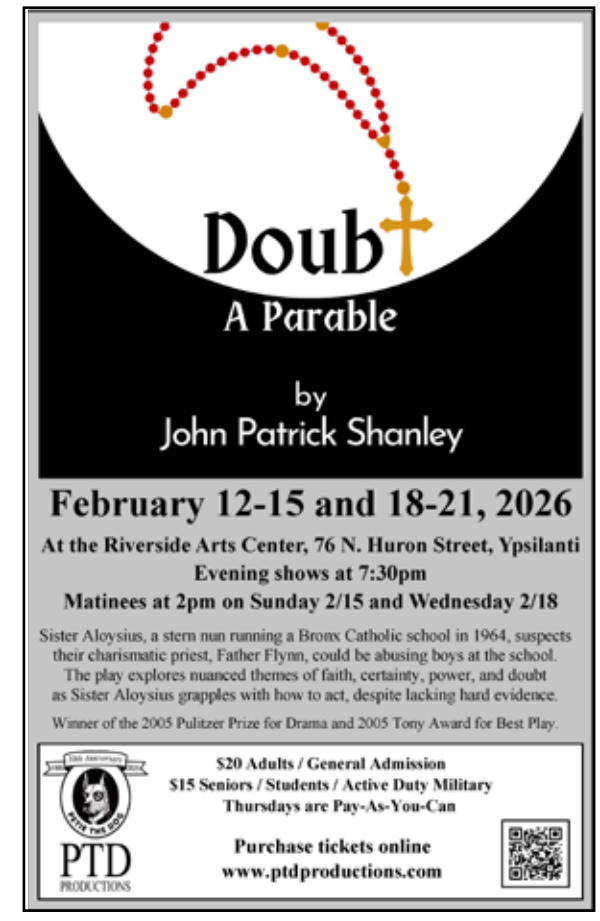
Drawing from letters historian Candace Falk found in the back of a record store — the owner showed them to her when she learned her dog was named "Red Emma Goldman" — Lehrman and Kramer's piece reveals Goldman as a sexual creature with a biting wit. And it makes the case that while she was condemned to a life away from America for her so-called subversion, she was nonetheless a patriot.

"It's important that people see that there was a courageous way of being very much American that was not the same thing as just buckling under when McCarthy comes and says, 'You guys have to shut up now,'" said Kramer.

Though the portrait in *E.G.* makes for a more comprehensive profile than the one now at Lincoln Center, it also presents something larger in its invitation to consider her legacy.

"E.G. means 'For example, take this example,'" said Kramer. "Not in the sense of cloning Emma in all respects, but certainly the insistence on understanding and the courage to push for things that are right, even if they're not popular, and that others should do that too."

In the canon of musical theater, there are many examples to choose from. I like the one who dances. Sign me up for a shirt. ■



February Calendar

Always check websites or call for updates before planning to attend anything listed here.

Sunday 1
Tu B'Shvat celebration for whole community at the JCC. 10 a.m.
Tu B'Shvat Environmental Seder, at Beth Israel. 4:30 p.m**.**
Tu B'Shvat Seder with Pardes Hannah and AARC. At the Lesie Science Center. 7 p.m.

Monday 2 Tu B'Shvat

Tuesday 3

Wednesday 4
Yidish tish: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group): Zoom. About 45 minutes each of conversation and reading. Free and open to all those interested in Yiddish language, literature, and culture, no matter what level of proficiency. For more information email Elliot H. Gertel at egertel@umich.edu at least one day before scheduled meeting day every Wednesday (except major Jewish holidays). 2:00 p.m.

Thursday 5
JCC: Amster Gallery Exhibition with Joseph Bergman and Esther + Shai-Lee Jakar. At the JCC. 6 p.m.

Friday 6
Candle Lighting 5:38 p.m.

Saturday 7 Yitro
Havdallah 6:40 p.m.

Sunday 8

Monday 9

Tuesday 10
When Hebrew Met the Machine: A book talk with Ido Ramati and Shachar Pinsker. Frankel Center. 5 p.m.

Wednesday 11
***Yidish tis*h**: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group, see above): Zoom. 2 p.m.

Thursday 12
A2 Vision Talent Show at the JCC. 5:30 p.m.

Friday 13
Candle Lighting 5:47 p.m.

Saturday 14 Mishpatim
Havdallah 6:49 p.m.
Climate Action Shabbat: AARC and A2J CC, at the JCC. 10 a.m.

Sunday 15

Monday 16
Dr. Samira Mehta on "Jews of Color: One Term, Many Communities." At EMU Center for Jewish Studies. 7 p.m.

Tuesday 17 Rosh Chodesh Adar

Wednesday 18 Rosh Chodesh Adar
***Yidish tis*h**: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group, see above): Zoom. 2 p.m.
An Evening of Civic Engagement, at BIC. 7 p.m**.**

Thursday 19
JCC Book Series Lunch & Learn with Roni Fantanesh Malkai. At the JCC. 12 noon.

Friday 20
Candlelight 5:56 p.m.
"A Joyride in Memory Care" a play. Feb 20-21. See article on page 3.

Saturday 21 Terumah
Havdallah 6:57 p.m.

Sunday 22
Jewish Storytime at the AADL. Downtown Branch. Register on JLive. 10:30 a.m.

Monday 23

Tuesday 24
Jewish Journalism in Dark Times. Frankel Center. 5 p.m.

Wednesday 25
***Yidish tis*h**: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group, see above): Zoom. 2 p.m.

Thursday 26

Friday 27
Candlelight 6:05 p.m.

Saturday 28 Tetzaveh
Havdallah 7:06 p.m. ■

Jewish Spring Holiday Calendar 2026

Tu B'shvat February 2
We are connected to the land that sustains us and it is our mitzvah to care for it.

Purim March 2-3
A time to rejoice and remember how bravery and hope won against all odds.

Passover April 1-9
The journey of freedom begins with trust in our future

February at Beth Israel

Tu B'Shvat Environmental Seder
Monday, February 1, 4:30 p.m.
Join us for a special Tu B'Shvat seder led by Rabbi Caine with environmental readings, mystically symbolic fruits and juice, and special words from Shoshanna Lenski, Executive Director of Ann Arbor's Sustainable Energy Utility.

Winter Adult Hebrew Sessions with Milka Eliav Begin
Tuesday, February 2
Introductory Hebrew 5–6 p.m.
Prayer Book 6:15–7 p.m.
Beginning Conversation 7:15–8 p.m.
Advanced Conversation 8:15–9 p.m.
Register through the calendar on our website as soon as possible. Please note that we must have at least 5 people registered to run a class.

Kiddush Kibbitz
Saturday, February 7, 12:15 p.m.
Come for Shabbat services and stay for stimulating conversation about a topic that interests you! Choose the table with the topic you'd like to discuss. A great opportunity to get to know other congregants better!

World Wide Wrap
Sunday, February 8, 9:30 am.
Learn to wrap teffilin in minyan at 9:30. At 10:15, BIRS students will join and Rav Nadav will do a presentation and give the kids an opportunity to practice.

Chavurat Nashim Hamantashen Baking and Mishloach Manot Making with Amanda Fisher
Wednesday, February 11, 4:30 p.m.
Amanda Fisher will lead us in baking mini hamantashen and then we will assemble mishloach manot bags to give to new members and older members. Join us in fulfilling this mitzvah of giving portions to community members! We need donations (for the bags) and drivers (to deliver the bags). Please register through the calendar and follow the Sign Up Genius link to register to bring items and deliver bags.

Aura of Kabbalat Shabbat
Friday, February 13, 5 p.m.
A Jewish Renewal-inspired singing service led by Rabbi Aura Ahuvia. The choir, dubbed the "Holy Levites," will be holding a rehearsal at 5:30 p.m. leading right up to and seamlessly into services. All are welcome to attend.

ISRAEL360 Presents Ambreen Ben Schmuel
Sunday, February 15, 7 p.m.
Save the date — more information to come.

Tot Shabbat
Saturday, February 7 and 21, 11 a.m.
Join us for a playful morning of Jewish songs and stories. Challah and grape juice kiddush included. For kids age 1 through 1st grade and parents, but all are welcome.

Talmud Study with Rabbi Dobrusin via Zoom
Mondays at 4 p.m.
The class meets on Zoom on Monday afternoons from 4–5:15. We will read the text in the original Hebrew or Aramaic with an accompanying English translation and discuss the text in English. No familiarity with Hebrew or prior experience studying Talmud is required. This fall and winter, we will be studying from the third chapter of the tractate of Bava Metzia which addresses issues of the obligations and responsibilities of people who are taking care of objects or animals belonging to another person. All are welcome!

Theology Book Club — Online
Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
Beth Israel Congregation's Theology Book Club welcomes you to join them to read together and discuss books on Jewish thought and beliefs. The books are in English. Contact Paul Shifrin at (248) 514-7276 for more information.

In Person and Online Services

Everyone is welcome to join Beth Israel for services, classes, and events. Services are being held in person and virtually, unless otherwise noted on the calendar. Below is a list of the links to participate virtually in services at Beth Israel. Beth Israel is live streaming services on the Beth Israel YouTube channel (Beth Israel Congregation AA MI). All links are also available on the Beth Israel homepage (www.bethisrael-aa.org). Please note that passwords are used. Contact the office to get the passwords at office@bethisrael-aa.org.

Minyan
Sundays at 9:30 a.m. in the M&M Chapel and online
Sundays–Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. online only

Friday Evening Services — in person and virtual
Kabbalat Shabbat Service at 5 p.m.

Shabbat Morning Services — in person and virtual
Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. ■

Lunch & Learn with Roni Fantanesh Malkai

By Eva Kubacki, Ann Arbor JCC

The Ann Arbor JCC will host the first Lunch & Learn of this year's Jewish Book Series on Thursday, February 19, from 12–1 p.m. Enjoy a delicious kosher lunch at the JCC while hearing from Roni Fantanesh Malkai, author of *We Are Black Jews* over Zoom. Malkai is an Ethiopian-Israeli activist, journalist, and author. Her work focuses on addressing nuanced social conflicts around race, equality, and social justice.

We Are Black Jews tells the story and history of the Ethiopian Jewish community, highlighting the unique Jewish identity and culture of Beta Israel. The book explores Beta Israel's immigration to Israel from Ethiopia and their struggle for equality once in Israel. The story weaves together personal narratives with historical accounts, bringing in Malkai's personal experience coming to Israel with her family as refugees on foot.

The cost of this program is $12.50/person. Register now on JLive.app. ■

Pardes Hannah in February

February 1
Mystical Tu B'Shvat Seder. In-person and online. 6:30 p.m.

February 7
Shabbat Morning Services. In-person and online. 10 a.m.

February 17
Rosh Chodesh Circle. Online only. 7 p.m.

February 21
Study Session in-person and online. 3 p.m. ■

Jewish Cultural Society

All are invited to join the JCS on February 6 at 6:30 p.m. to welcome Shabbat. Dinner from a local restaurant follows a short observance that includes secular readings, songs, candle lighting, wine, and challah. Children are welcome. Dinner is free for JCS members. The cost of dinner for non-members is $10/person or $25/family. Advanced registration on our website is available to help with planning: www.jewishculturalsociety.org. 6:30 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center, 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48108 ■

TBE events in February

Events and services are both in person and/or virtual. Please see www.templebethemeth.org for full details, location information, and links.

Tot Shabbat Service & Dinner
Fridays at 5:45 p.m.
Join the Clergy to celebrate Shabbat with fun activities, stories, songs, and age-appropriate learning for children ages 0–5. Registration requested.

Elementary Shabbat Service & Dinner (every second Friday of the month)
Fridays at 5:45 p.m.
A short service, song session, and community building! Most appropriate for children ages 5–10 and their parents, grandparents, and other adults. Everyone is welcome! Registration requested.

Wine & Cheese Shabbat Reception
Fridays at 6 p.m. (except for the second Friday of each month)

Shabbat Service
Fridays at 6:30 p.m. (Every second Friday of the month is at 7:30 p.m.)

Saturday Shabbat service
Saturdays at 10 a.m.

Shabbat morning Torah study
Saturdays at 8:50 a.m.
Join us for this weekly discussion of the Torah portion.

Weekday morning blessings
Weekdays at 9:15 a.m.
Join TBE lay leaders each weekday morning for a short service of song, poetry, and meditation.

Twenty-five-minute mindfulness with Jewish spiritual director Linda Greene
Tuesdays at 8:30 a.m.
Zoom room opens at 8:15 a.m. for optional check-in. Blessing and intention setting 8:30–8:35 a.m. Meditate 8:35–9 a.m. Start your day centered and connected.

Queer Torah Study
Tuesdays at 7 p.m.
Join us on Zoom for a discussion of queer themes in the weekly Torah portion! Led by Ari Marcotte, Zelda Marcotte & Ari Smith. Guest leaders welcome! Contact Zelda (zeldamaybiz@gmail.com) for more information.

Back Door Food Pantry
Thursdays, 4 to 7 p.m.

Meditation with Claire Weiner
Thursdays at 5 p.m.
Join Claire Weiner for a 40-minute meditation session.

Weekly Mahj
Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.
Wednesdays at 12:30 p.m.

WTBE Gift Shop Open
Friday at 5:30 p.m. (Every second Friday of the month is at 7:30 p.m.)
Washtenaw County's only Judaica Shop!

Jewish Book Club
Thursdays, February 5, 12, 19, and 26, 11 a.m.

Liberal Zionism: Between Crisis and Aspiration Class
Thursdays, February 5, 12, 19, and 26, 7 p.m.
Fridays, February 6, 13, 20, and 27, 12 p.m.

Jewish Monsters & Magic II
Sundays, February 8 and 22, 4 p.m.

WTBE Fiber Arts
Monday, February 9, 7 p.m.

WTBE Historical Novel Reading Group
Wednesday, February 11, 1 p.m.

Brotherhood Guys Night Out
Thursday, February 12, 6 p.m.

Shabbat Service in honor of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month
Friday, February 13, 7:30 p.m.

Bereavement Group
Tuesday, February 17, 4 p.m.

LGBTQ Shabbat Potluck
Friday, February 20, 5:30 p.m.

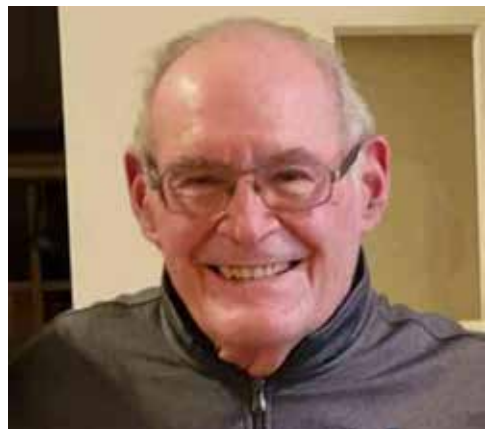
Choir Shabbat
Friday, February 27, 6:30 p.m. ■

Obituaries

The WJN prints obituaries, memories, and eulogies free of charge for family members of Washtenaw Jewish community members as a service to the community and to honor the lives of those who have passed away. When local congregations send condolence notices to the WJN, the editor searches for obituaries online. Also, community members are invited to send obituaries to the editor.

Susan Anne Grubb (3/5/1937–1/5/2026) passed away peacefully in her home at Hillside Terrace in Ann Arbor from Alzheimer's dementia. Susan was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Edwin W. Grubb and Mary Coddington Grubb. She attended high school in Elmira, New York, and graduated from Elmira College in 1955. She married Henry C. Cole in 1962 but the marriage ended in divorce. Susan worked as a speech therapist, in social work, and in reproductive justice before deciding in the 1990s to obtain a master's degree in religion at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

She married Robert (Bob) Davidow in 1996 and together they enjoyed travel, movies, singing, and pursuing social justice causes. Susan and Bob moved to Ann Arbor in the 2000s and became active members of the Jewish Cultural Society of Ann Arbor. Susan was extremely fond and proud of her younger sister Lynne G. Cochran. They sang together as children and whenever they got a chance as adults, and Susan delighted in hearing stories about Lynne's children. Susan was devastated when Lynne tragically passed away in 2011. Susan was preceded in death by her husband Bob (2024). She is survived by her brother-in-law John Cochran, niece Amy Cochran Kasper and nephew Jonathan Cochran, stepchildren Laura Hirshbein (Peretz Hirshbein), Philip Davidow (Anna Davidow), step-grandchildren Abigail Hirshbein, Daniel Hirshbein, James Davidow, Alexander Davidow, and grandnieces and grandnephews. .■



Phillip Levin, 86, of Ann Arbor, Michigan (previously of Troy and Bloomfield Hills), died December. 22, 2025. Phil always had a smile on his face and liked to joke around so much that friends and family could never really tell whether his stories were real or fiction. Each time a story was told, it became slightly more fantastic.

Growing up, he played football at the Kiski School outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and his 1956 varsity team was inducted into their Hall of Fame for an undefeated season, even after playing against some college teams. He continued playing tackle as a freshman at the University of Pittsburgh.

After graduating from Pitt with both undergraduate and M.B.A. degrees, he eventually found his way to Detroit, working for Ford and then Coopers and Lybrand (now PWC) before retiring and starting his own firm, Levin Development.

Later in life, Phil enjoyed attending meetings of the Senior Men's Club of Birmingham.

He met the love of his life, Fran, at a local public pool in 1958. Since then, they have been inseparable and have spent the last 67 years giving meaning to the words "loving each other more than the day before." They lit up the room when they were together, smiling and holding hands like they first met. They kept active their entire lives playing tennis and golf or going to the gym together. It didn't matter what activity they did as long as it was together — even watching *Jeopardy* or *Wheel of Fortune* in the evenings.

Phil is survived by his wife, Fran. He was the cherished father of Erika (Jordan Shavit) and Robert (Curtis Schuhmacher); loving grandfather of Eli and Simon; devoted brother of Gail Fried (Walter). He is also survived by many nieces, nephews, and numerous loving friends and other relatives.

Phil was predeceased by siblings, Arnold (Anita) and Elaine. He was the precious son of the late George and Elizabeth Levin. Contributions may be made to Jewish Family Service or to support Fran's struggle with Parkinson's at gofund.me/b23fd9d46. .■

Simchas and Sorrows

The Washtenaw Jewish community sends condolences to the families of:

Phillip Levin, father of Erika Levin (Jordan Shavit), grandfather of Eli & Simon Shavit. Monday, December 22, 2025.
Pauli Weizman. Sunday, January 4, 2026.
Martha "Ernie" Ernestine Darsky, aunt of Sheri Eisenbeiser and great aunt of Dina Pedersen.
Sari Shifrin, wife of Paul Shifrin and mother of Jonah Shifrin, Rachael Lawrence-Lupton, Kayla Shifrin, and Mira Spenner.
Susan Anne Grubb, stepmother of Laura Hirshbein, January 5.

The Washtenaw Jewish community sends mazel tovs to:

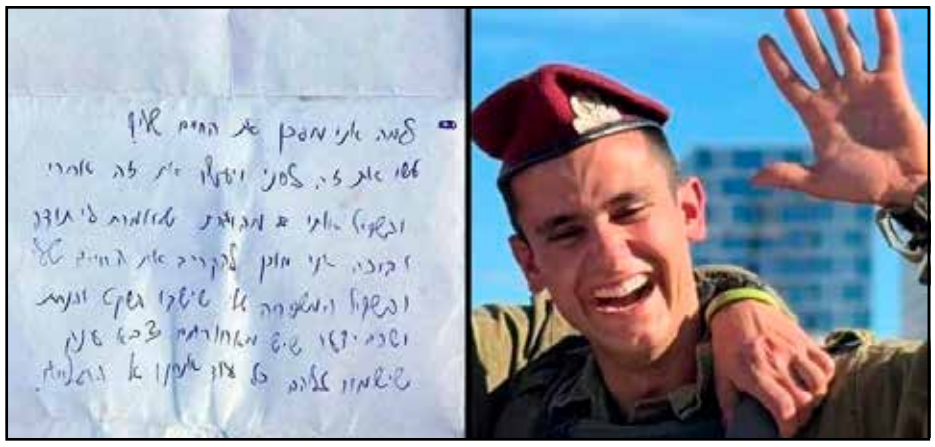
Niva Pedersen on her afternoon bat mitzvah, February 7.
Cheryl and Mark Good on the birth of their grandson, Field Ronald Nelson, son of Miranda and Colin, and brother of Willow and Aidan.
Paul and Carolyn Lichter (great grandparents), Haran and Nikki Rashes and Laurie Lichter z"l (grandparents) on the birth of Esther Ann Levy, daughter of Ilana and Rabbi Jeremy Levy.
Denise Thal and David Scobey on the birth of their granddaughter, Golda Lou Page, daughter of Jake Scobey Thal and Allyson Page, and sister of Frieda.

Feature

Adraba prayer for compassion

By Shifra Epstein

In the shadows of conflict, stories of hope and humanity shine. The life and legacy of Sergeant Reef Harush, who fell in Gaza, illuminate the enduring power of empathy and the ripple effect one person's spirit can have. At the heart of his legacy is the Adraba prayer, discovered in his uniform after his death on April 6, 2024, symbolizing a spiritual anchor amid turmoil. This article explores Reef's story, weaving together personal reflections, concrete examples of community impact, and the living legacy that continues to grow in his memory.



Born in Kibbutz Ramat David in the Jezreel Valley, Reef Harush was drawn to Tel Aviv's vibrant energy. Friends describe him as "the heart of every gathering," always with a joke, a listening ear, or a plan for the next adventure. "Reef was the guy you called at 2 a.m., whether you were stranded or just needed to talk," recalls his childhood friend, Noam Levi. He loved good food, music, and the outdoors, but above all, he cherished the company of friends and family.

Reef's aspirations were grounded in service. After high school, he was accepted to the Five Fingers Pre-Military Academy, a pluralistic institution fostering moral excellence and leadership. The Academy's approach — combining physical and ethical training — left an indelible mark on Reef. "He was always the first to volunteer, not just for the tough tasks, but for the ones no one noticed," says Academy instructor Dana Meiri. These values carried through his IDF service, where he enlisted in May 2023, completed basic training, and joined the elite Egoz Unit by August. The challenges of special forces training forged unbreakable bonds with his team and tested his kindness and resilience.

It was within this crucible of preparation and camaraderie that Reef's moral compass was both tested and affirmed — a journey that would soon intersect with a small but profound symbol of faith: the Adraba prayer.

After Reef's death in Gaza, his sister Zoi found a folded piece of paper in his uniform pocket — the Adraba prayer, composed by Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. Unlike standard military tokens, this prayer was a source of spiritual grounding, a plea to "see the virtues in others" and to love without envy or hatred. His father, Avi, recalls, "We always taught Reef to seek the good in people, but he took it further — he lived it, even in war." Reef received the prayer during a workshop at the Five Fingers Academy, led by Rabbi Meir Ben David, who recalls, "Reef's eyes lit up during the session on loving freely; he carried that message with him."

The Adraba prayer became Reef's spiritual compass, a manifesto for empathy in the midst of conflict. His father shares, "He didn't want to be a hero for glory's sake. He wanted to be truly good — not just in words, but in the quiet moments when no one was watching."

Reef's reflections: motivation and purpose

In his own heartfelt words, preserved in letters to his family before entering Gaza, Reef revealed the depth of his motivations and the values driving his service. He wrote, "Why am I risking my life? Others have done it before me, and others will after. For that elderly woman who says thank you and cries — I am willing to give my life. And for my family, that they may sit in peace and quiet, knowing that behind them stands a great army that will protect them as long as we are standing on our feet."

His final letter to his siblings carries an enduring message: "Remember the child within you, always. A huge heart, full of love, real and honest. Your uniqueness is your strength. Keep holding on to these values, and good things will come. True and full of love."

Avi Harush remembers his last conversation with Reef: "I told him not to be a hero. Heroes die first. He smiled and said, 'I'm just doing what I believe is right.'" Since Reef's passing, Avi has collected his son's diaries and mementoes, finding solace — and purpose — in sharing Reef's story with others.

Legacy: from grief to action

Reef's legacy did not end with his family; it sparked a movement rooted in empathy and action. Friends recount how, in the wake of his death, they have changed their own behaviors. Maya, a fellow Egoz soldier, describes how she now carries a copy of the Adraba prayer in her vest: "When I'm exhausted or angry, I read it and try to see the good — even in my rivals. That's Reef's gift to me."

Community initiatives have blossomed in his name. The "In Reef's Footsteps" project, launched by his friends and local leaders, organized a nationwide day of service in 2025. Over 1,200 volunteers, including youth from diverse backgrounds, cleaned parks, delivered food to the elderly, and held empathy workshops in schools. "Before, we'd talk about unity as an abstract idea," says project coordinator Lior Cohen. "Now, we have numbers: volunteerism in our town increased by 37% after the first event. People keep telling us, 'I did this for Reef.'"

Another tangible outcome is the "Adraba Circles" initiative, where weekly gatherings invite participants to share stories of kindness inspired by Reef's example. One participant, Yael, recalls, "For the first time, I apologized to a neighbor I'd argued with for years. Adraba helped me see her differently."

These efforts have reached beyond Reef's hometown. Schools across Israel have incorporated Adraba readings and discussions about empathy into their curricula, and youth groups report a measurable increase in conflict resolution activities. As one teacher notes, "We're seeing fewer disciplinary issues, more cooperation, and a shift in how students approach disagreements."

Media Reflection and the Evolving Identity of Soldiers

Media coverage of Reef's story sparked a national conversation about the changing role of Israeli soldiers. Editorials reflected on how Reef, and others like him, model a new kind of heroism — one rooted in compassion as much as courage. "He was a warrior with a gentle heart," wrote one columnist, "proving that strength and empathy are not opposites, but allies." This narrative is shifting public perception, inviting greater understanding of the emotional complexity and humanity of those who serve.

The "In Reef's Footsteps" initiative has also inspired similar projects in other units, focusing on leadership through service and emotional intelligence. The IDF now encourages recruits to participate in community-oriented workshops, citing Reef's story as an example.

Pilgrimage and Remembrance: Adraba at Rabbi Elimelech's Shrine

Eleven months after Reef's passing, I embarked with my sister Dalia and a group of Hasidic women on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Rabbi Elimelech in Leżajsk, Poland. There, in the women's section, I recited Adraba prayer from a copy of the scratch paper founded in Reef's pocket. I recited in Reef's memory and for all soldiers lost in Gaza. Standing there, I felt Reef's presence. deeply and tangibly.

These rituals, combining ancient tradition with contemporary remembrance, have forged new bonds between generations and across borders, reinforcing the timeless message of unity and compassion.

The city was covered in posters with the Adraba prayer and Rabbi Elimelech's image. I felt as if the whole community was embracing us and our grief.

Sergeant Reef Harush's life and sacrifice highlight how qualities like empathy, humility, and hope are essential not only during conflict but also at home. His journey represents more than loss; it's about transformation — where deeply held values grow into actions that benefit others, and mourning inspires people to build connections. As his sister Zoi puts it, "Reef showed us that true bravery means choosing love repeatedly." Let his memory motivate all of us to pursue goodness, act kindly, and continue his legacy through every compassionate act.

Rabbis Corner

Why is Tu B'Shvat in the winter?

By Rabbi Aharon Goldstein, Chabad of Ann Arbor

On Monday, February 2, we will be celebrating the New Year for Trees. I don't know about where you live, but where I live, it's freezing, with plenty of snow covering the trees. If you want to celebrate the trees, do it in spring. Why now, right in the middle of winter? Why celebrate trees when nothing is growing?

The 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat — or Tu B'Shvat, as it is commonly called — is not the Jewish version of Arbor Day, but is considered the "New Year for Trees," with real implications for Jewish law. The 15th of Shevat serves to separate one year from the next with regard to the laws of maaserot (tithes of produce), orlah (the fruits of the first three years, which are forbidden for consumption), and sheviit (Shemittah, the Sabbatical year).

For example, the law of orlah is that the fruit of a tree may not be eaten during the first three years after its planting. The fruits of the fourth year are called neta reva'i, and are sanctified; they must be eaten in Jerusalem or "redeemed" with money. From the fifth year on, the fruits may be consumed in the normal manner.

But how do we calculate when the tree has turned three and then four? From Tu B'Shvat.

Practically, this means that the fruit that grows after 15 Shevat of year four may be eaten in Jerusalem, and those grown after 15 Shevat of year five can be eaten at home. Why was this date chosen?

As is the case with many Torah laws, the halachah is based on what happens in the Land of Israel. So, since most of Israel's rainy season is over by the 15th of Shevat, this date is considered the New Year for Trees. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) explains that at this point the ground has become saturated with the rains of the new year, causing the sap to start rising in the trees, which means that the fruit can begin to bud.

The Jerusalem Talmud records an alternative explanation. Until the New Year for Trees, all trees can survive on the water from the previous year. After their New Year, the trees derive their life source from the water of the new year.

If you are reading this in sub-zero weather, you may find the most comfort in the explanation of Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249–c. 1310), who points out that the winter season extends from the month of Tevet until the month of Nissan. The 15th of Shevat is the midpoint between fall and spring. Once half the winter has passed, its strength is weakened, the cold is not as intense, and the budding process begins.

So take heart. Yes, it may be smack in the middle, but the warmth of spring is on its way. ■

Celebrating a total of

$15.85 million

estimated value as of December 31, 2025

We recognize these members of the greater Ann Arbor L'Dor V'Dor Circle, who have committed to the future of the greater Ann Arbor Jewish community.

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Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor

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Anonymous

***Listing as of December 31, 2025**

Bold indicates Letter of Intent has been formalized

	LOI received	% formalized
Ann Arbor Orthodox Minyan	18	22
Ann Arbor Reform Congregation	57	67
Chabad Avenue	35	69
Center for Jewish Studies, Eastern Michigan University	25	64
Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor	60	63
Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor	53	74
Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor	39	69
JCS	18	50
JFS Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County	63	75
Temple Beth Emeth	80	80
Hillel University of Michigan	45	64

For more information on how to create your own Jewish legacy, contact the Ann Arbor Life & Legacy Manager Osnat Gafni-Pappas at osnat@jewishannarbor.org or (734) 773-3538.

Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor

Upcoming EVENTS

FEBRUARY

1 - Community Tu B'Shevat
5 - Amster Gallery Exhibition with Joseph Bergman and Esther & Shai-Lee Jakar
12 - A2 Vision: An Ann Arbor Talent Showcase for All Ages
19 - Jewish Book Series: Lunch & Learn with Roni Malkai, author of *We Are Black Jews*

MARCH

12 - A Night of Comedy and FUNdraising: Benefiting PJ Library
22 - Matzah Factory
26 - Jewish Book Series: Lunch & Learn with Ayelet Tsabari, author of *Songs for the Brokenhearted*
31 - *The Milkman* Exhibition presented by Chuck Newman

APRIL

7 - Jewish Book Series: with Gwen Strauss, author of *Milena and Margarete: A Love Story in Ravensbrück* with music accompaniment
14 - Yom Ha'Shoah Art History Discussion

MAY

3-13 - Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival
5 - Lag B'Omer Celebration
7 - Jewish Book Series: Lunch & Learn with Judith Viorst, author of *Making the Best of What's Left*
14 - Amster Gallery Exhibition with Joan Cohen Jones

JCC community events are open to the public. All are welcome to join.

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